P A S S I N G G L O R Y

Polish 3/20/95

John Sayles

EXT. BALTIMORE STREET - DAY - POLICE CARS

A pair of POLICE CARS speed toward us, SIRENS BLASTING-

POLICE BARRICADE

We TRACK along the line of a POLICE BARRICADE, made mostly of patrol cars lined up end-to-end, their FLASHERS STROBING. Members of the RIOT SQUAD are forming a picket line, SUN GLINTING off their reflective face-shields. We hear CHANTING-

FIELD - PROTESTORS

A couple hundred PROTESTORS, mostly Black and Hispanic, stand surrounded by police in an empty lot. They wave placards stating "HOLY REDEEMER OUT OF WEST SIDE", "SAVE OUR COMMUNITY CENTER" and "NO MORE IMPERIALISM", CHANTING as they circle to face the cops-

CLOSER, PROTESTORS

Angry and edgy about what's going to happen next-

PROTESTORS
Church go home! Church go home!

POLICE - CAPTAIN

The CAPTAIN in charge of the riot squad steps forward with a bullhorn-

CAPTAIN (on bullhorn)
You people are trespassing on private property! I'm giving you three minutes to disperse! If you have not vacated the premises by that time we will start making arrests!

RIOT COP

We see a RIOT COP fixing a canister of tear gas onto a launcher-

PROTESTORS

Still CHANTING, the outer circle of men link arms as those inside begin to tie wet handkercheifs around their mouths and noses-

PROTESTORS
Down with Holy Redeemer! Down with Holy Redeemer!

PONTIAC

A long, jet-black Pontiac cruises up behind the barricade, cops stepping out of the way as they move to join the assault line, clubs out and ready-

CAPTAIN

A police SERGEANT rushes up to talk to the Captain-

SERGEANT
They're here, sir!

CAPTAIN
About time-

PONTIAC

We start on the ground as the passenger door opens and we see the shiny BLACK SHOES of the man who steps out. We TILT up along black pants, black belt, black shirt to a large CRUCIFIX dangling mid-chest-

PROTESTERS

A TEENAGE BOY steps out from the crowd and throws a clump of dirt from the lot-

POLICE

One of the riot police catches it on his shield. That's all the cops need- they begin to charge across the lot toward the protestors!

CAPTAIN

Not happy with this turn of events-

CAPTAIN (on bullhorn)
Hold your line! There is no order to advance! Get back here!

Suddenly there is MONSIGNOR PERETTI and two black-robed AIDES beside him-

MONSIGNOR PERETTI
What's going on here?

SERGEANT
Looks like a riot to me-

THEIR POV - POLICE, PROTESTORS

Clubs swinging, people SCREAMING as they are dragged away through the cops to a line of PADDY WAGONS-

CAPTAIN, MONSIGNOR

MONSIGNOR PERETTI
We're building a rectory here. This isn't their land-

CAPTAIN
Tell them that. Some fella got em all riled up- handed us a list of non-negociable demands to pass on to you-

SERGEANT (sees, points)
That's him there-

THEIR POV - VERRETT

FATHER PAUL VERRETT, a young, intense Black man, is holding his hands out in front of himself, trying to reason with a cop who'd rather be whacking heads. As the cop clears our sight-line we see that Verrett wears the collar of a Catholic priest-

SERGEANT (O.S.)
Isn't he one of yours, Monsignor?

MONSIGNOR

The Monsignor closes his eyes, grabs hold of the crucifix-

MONSIGNOR PERETTI
God give me strength-

VERRETT

Gone limp as he is dragged by the feet to the paddy wagon. NEWS PHOTOGRAPHERS rush in on either side and begin shooting away-

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. 2-LANE HIGHWAY - NIGHT - HEADLIGHTS

OPENING CREDITS BEGIN as HEADLIGHTS approach from a distance, a long tunnel of piney woods illuminated in their spill. An OLD SCHOOL BUS pulls up and stops in front of us, IDLING-

WIDER

CRICKETS. The bus stands in silhouette under the lights of a nearly empty parking lot behind Greenville Park High School-

CU BUS DOOR

It THUNKS open-

CONNOR (inside bus)
Let's go, gentlemen.

INT. CORRIDOR - NIGHT

YOUNG MEN approach us from the end of a long, dim-lit cinderblock corridor. Someone is BOUNCING a BASKETBALL at the rear, ECHOING off the hard walls. As they come closer we see a team of black high school boys in their jackets and ties, serious game faces on. One by one they pass us- nervous Joe DAP Dapreneaux, intense SNOW Lutcher, pretty ANTOINE Toussaint, big TOUCHE Washington, cool ICE Gaineswith, and our main man, TRAVIS Porter. The Purple Knights inner circle. We HOLD on Travis, TRACKING back with him as he walks. Rangy and serious, he holds a wad of cardboard basketball player cards next to his ear, riffling their edges with his thumb-

INT. / EXT. UNION PASSENGER TERMINAL - NIGHT

The shiny silver Southeast Limited TRAIN blasts STEAM at us as it rolls to a halt under a huge rusty awning. The passenger door opens and out steps Verrett. He carries a battered suitcase with a look of grim determination. We TRACK BACK as he walks from the train, then stops as he sees-

VERRETT'S POV

We start on a sign on the terminal wall- RESTROOMS. There is an arrow pointing left to the WHITE and right to the COLORED bathroom-

PORTER (O.S.)
Hep you with that, suh?

VERRETT

Verrett stares for a moment as if he's seen a ghost-

VERRETT (mutters)
No thanks.

Verrett passes us and the man he spoke to, an elderly black RED CAP PORTER turns into the shot to watch him go, professional smile still frozen on his face-

INT. CAB - NIGHT - WESLEY

WESLEY, a black cabbie in his 50's, nagivates through downtown New Orleans streets as Aaron Neville sings Tell It Like It Is on the RADIO. NEON is reflected on the window glass around him-

WESLEY
Know your way around?

VERRETT (from back)
Not really.

We PAN back to see Verrett, staring moodily out at the raunchy strip they are passing through-

WESLEY
Get you most anything you could think of in New Awlins. Uh-oh-

We PAN with Verrett's gaze out the window to see a YOUNG BLACK MAN spread-eagled against a car in front of a nightclub, being frisked roughly by two white CITY COPS. We cruise past, PANNING back to Verrett as he watches, troubled-

WESLEY
Don't wanna be in that nigger's shoes. Not in this town.

INT. GREENVILLE HIGH LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT

Really just a storage room. The Purple Knights hang their clothes on hooks in the wall. Their uniforms have faded to different shades of purple and they weare a motley collection of cheap sneaker styles- Keds, PF Flyers- only Antoine has Converse All-Stars and his are stained yellow with sweat. We TRACK around the crowded, harsh-lit room as the boys dress and prepare. Snow paces, talking to himself rapid-fire-

SNOW
Shake an bake, man, flutter an float- aint never been beat, aint never been beat- take it to the man, take it to him- work your show, Snow, work your show-

He brings us to Dap, standing with one sock in hand, looking confused-

DAP
Hey, anybody got a-

A rolled-up sock hits him in the cheek and he catches it on the rebound-

DAP
Thanks, man-

We CONTINUE past to Antoine, already dressed, carelly checking his hair in the patchy mirror over the sink, then past him to long tall Touche who sits on a rickety bench, palming a basketball in his left hand. He bounces it and catches it in a palm with his right hand, stares at it, concentrating. We CONTINUE down the bench to see Ice lying down on the wood, staring coolly at the ceiling as COACH CONNOR, a weathered white man in his 50's, yanks tape from a roll and wraps the boy's ankle. He looks up as HEATWAVE HUNDLEY approaches with a play diagrammed in x's and o's. Heatwave, still in jacket and tie as the team manager, has shiny, processed hair and a professorial demeanor-

CONNOR
You never give up, do you?

HEATWAVE
Kentucky won a game with this last week.

CONNOR
Coach Rupp got a different kind of boys than we got here, doesn't he?

We FOLLOW Heatwave as he sighs and wanders away, bringing us to Travis. Travis sits with sneakers unlaced, staring at the player cards in his hands-

ECU CARDS

Faces and names flash by as he shuffles through them- all black pros. Willie Naulls, Nate Thurmond, Walt Hazzard, Zelmo Beatty, Bill Russell-

TRAVIS

He selects one of the cards, presses it tight over his heart, closes his eyes. A moment of communion-

EXT. RURAL ROAD - NIGHT

The taxi rolls through the piney woods outside of town-

INT. CAB - VERRETT

He listens as a news report plays on the RADIO up front-

ANNOUNCER (radio)
-Alabama today, when the local police, using dogs and fire hoses, broke up a demonstration of nearly five hundred Civil Rights-

The dial is wrenched away through some other stations till we hear Irma Thomas crooning something slow-

WESLEY
Some niggers don't know when to quit.

Verrett scowls, looks out the window-

WESLEY
You from up North?

VERRETT
Yeah. I suppose I am.

INT. GYM - NIGHT - BANNER

BRIGHT LIGHTS and CROWD NOISE now, CHEERLEADERS CHANTING. We read a banner hung from the wall- GO DEVILS!

CU CRUCIFIX

Dangling in front of a black cassock. We PULL BACK to see it is hung around the neck of FATHER ROBERT GRANT, a tough-looking white priest in his mid-60's standing on the sidelines of the old gym as black FANS take their seats behind him. Grant smiles and waves to somebody in the stands-

CU FEET

CHEERLEADERS' FEET rhythmically STOMP the slightly warped court floor. We TILT to see the Greenville CHEERLEADERS CHANT and CLAP to the tune of Iko Iko-

CHEERLEADERS
Greenville Devils take the floor
Iko Iko Ikay
Other team won't even score
Iko Iko Ikay
Talkin bout Greenville
Devils
Greenville Devils can play
We gonna whup the Purple Knights
Greenville Devils can play!

DEVILS TEAM

The home team take their warm-up shots, not totally at ease. A pair of DEVILS dribble near half-court, sneaking looks across the floor to the doorway to the visitors' dressing room-

DEVIL 1
I bet they aint so bad, man-

DEVIL 2
They sposed to be big, though.

STANDS

A black family, father HOWARD, mother THELMA and grandmother MOMMIT take their seats at courtside. Mommit is nearly blind and needs some help walking-

MOMMIT
We late. You always bringin me late.

THELMA
They're not out yet, Mama.

MOMMIT
I can hear that.

EXT. PARKING LOT - NIGHT - FEET

Shiny black shoes crunch over the gravel. We TILT to see Verrett, toting his suitcase. He pauses at the door to the gym, listening to the CHEERLEADERS and CROWD INSIDE. He takes a deep breath, plunges ahead-

INT. GYM - STANDS

Howard has left the women to join the FATHERS' CLUB, a group of black men ranging from their early 40's to late 50's-

ALPHONSE
Been watching these boys shoot.
Couple of them can put it in the net.

HOWARD
They best do it now while they still
can.

LAUGHTER from the men-

FATHER GRANT

Nervously pacing the sidelines. Coach Connor comes by followed by Heatwave carrying a net bag full of old leather balls and a heap of towels. Grant slaps Connor on the back as he passes. They are the only white people in the gym-

GRANT
Good luck, Coach.

Connor nods and continues past. Grant turns to look to the team entrance but there stands Verrett-

GRANT
Paul?

Verrett smiles shyly, puts his suitcase down-

VERRETT
Hello, Father.

GRANT
Good Lord, look at you! I didn't
expect you till next week!

VERRETT
I wanted to get started.

GRANT
When I heard you'd volunteered to
come-

VERRETT
I didn't volunteer. You know that.

Grant is taken aback for a moment but then distracted as the CROWD BOOS. We PAN with his gaze to Heatwave. Heatwave rolls a ball from the visitors' bench toward the door. We FOLLOW it, then PAN AHEAD to see the Purple Knights trot out of the locker room in double file. The inner circle players cut to the right and the reserves make a rebound line along the baseline. The first reserve toe-flips the rolling ball into his hands-

MOMMIT

She holds out her hand and the inner circle boys each slap her five as they loop out toward the foul line, the home FANS still BOOING and CATCALLING-

KNIGHTS

Snow starts to the hoop as the reserve bounces the ball to him- SLAM! SLAM! SLAM! SLAM! SLAM! SLAM! It is quick and emphatic, six Knights in a row DUNKING the ball ferociously. We TILT DOWN to the ball, left bouncing to a standstill under the hoop for effect-

STANDS

The home fans nearly silent in awe-

PLAYERS

The two Devils stand in front of their open-mouthed teammates, confidence drained-

DEVIL 1
Damn.

PRIESTS

Father Grant is tickled, watching the court as Verrett looks around at the shabby little gym-

GRANT
Ever see a high school team do that?

VERRETT (distracted)
Things haven't changed much, have they?

OPENING CREDITS END

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. CALLIOPE HOUSING PROJECT - MORNING

Three-story brick colonials in prison rows, set back from a weed-choked field.

The 'Honey Dripper', a colorfully painted produce truck with boxes of greens and bundles of sugar cane bouncing in the rear turns into the project, playing its wake-up SONG for the neighborhood-

CLOSER - BUILDING

A green door on a slab porch, torn screen flapping in the breeze-

INT. PORTER APARTMENT - DAY

Tight quarters, made tighter by Catholic religious pictures and statues everywhere you turn. Oak parquet floors, concrete walls. We hear SIZZLING-

INT. KITCHEN - CU SKILLET

EGGS fry in bacon grease. We PULL BACK to see Thelma in her maid's uniform, stirring grits, shaking the eggs. Howard sits in a t-shirt, buried in the Picayune sports section-

THELMA (calls)
Travis!

TRAVIS (O.S.,upstairs)
Coming!

THELMA
Got to pry that boy out of bed.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY

We FOLLOW as Travis hurries out of his room, fastening his clip-on tie, and steps into his grandmother's room. Mommit sits on the edge of her bed in her bathrobe-

MOMMIT
Somebody moved my slippers.

TRAVIS (kneels)
Naw Mommit, they right here-

He gently puts the slippers on her feet-

MOMMIT
Okay, test time- graduated Indiana U., field goal percent 49, 31.6 points a game-

TRAVIS
Walt Bellamy, 61-62 season, Baltimore Bullets.

MOMMIT
Nuh-uh.

He turns and she grabs on for a piggy-back ride. He lifts her easily-

MOMMIT
They the Bullets now-

TRAVIS
Chicago Packers.

MOMMIT
That's my boy.

INT. KITCHEN

Thelma sets breakfast in front of Howard-

THELMA
If he can play that old roundball day and night, he can open a book.

Howard doesn't look up from the paper-

HOWARD
I'll talk to him.

Travis enters with Mommit on his back-

MOMMIT
What the paper say bout my Celtics, Howard?

HOWARD
Beat the Pistons.

Travis squats to deposit Mommit in a chair-

HOWARD (to Travis)
How many did Antoine put in for you last night?

Travis taps Howard's Picayune-

TRAVIS
You won't find it in there. They only cover the white boy games.
(leaving)
I'm late-

THELMA
Your father wants to talk to you, Travis!

HOWARD
Right. Uhm-
(looks to Thelma)
What was it about?

THELMA
I got a warning notice for you in history.

TRAVIS
It's boring.

THELMA
Your father paying good money to send you to St. Augustine- you think they there to entertain you? How are you going to move on to college-

TRAVIS
I got three schools after me-

THELMA
After you to play basketball. What if you get hurt?

TRAVIS
I don't get hurt. I'm late, Mama-

THELMA
I don't see this history grade rise up, your father gonna pull you right off that court. Isn't that right, Howard?

Howard looks up from his paper-

HOWARD
Huh?

But Travis is out the door. Howard looks up to find Thelma glaring at him-

HOWARD
What'd I do?

EXT. PROJECT - MORNING

Travis runs out through the buildings. LITTLE RICKY and CLANKY hang out on the second story balcony of one of the houses. Little Ricky is just 20, a junkie who's health isn't totally ruined yet. Clanky is a bit older, a wino already nursing a bottle of cheap wine. They call down-

LITTLE RICKY
Hear you boys did good last night.

Travis moves the books he carries to hide them with his body- *

TRAVIS
Hey, Little Ricky. What up?

LITTLE RICKY
Oh- hangin in. Don't let me hold you, my nigger.

TRAVIS
Right. Later.

CLOSER - LITTLE RICKY AND CLANKY

The two watch Travis hurry across the street-

CLANKY
Who the nigger think he is, little nun-school tie and shit-

LITTLE RICKY
Lighten up, Clanky. That's my boy.

EXT. CANAL STREET - DAY

A picket line of black college-age MEN AND WOMEN, led by ERNEST and ROD, marches a circle in front of a Woolworth's. Angry white ONLOOKERS SCREAM insults and curses. We PAN away to see Travis running, slowing to watch for a second, then hurrying to catch a departing bus-

INT. BUS

Heatwave sits working his x's and o's in a spiral notebook-

TRAVIS (O.S.)
That doesn't look like any math homework.

HEATWAVE (looks up)
Hey! Park it here, brother.

As Travis sits by Heatwave we see that an invisible line separates the white riders in the front from the black ones in the rear-

TRAVIS
Don't know why you keep on with that.
Coach don't want to hear about it.

HEATWAVE (shrugs)
You never know.

INT. SCHOOL - STAIRWELL - DAY

Verrett smokes a Camel at the top of a flight of stairs, looking out a window to the yard. He hears FOOTSTEPS. We PAN to see Travis sprint up the stairs two at a time, screeching to a halt when he sees Verrett-

TRAVIS'S POV - VERRETT

We PAN from the face to the clerical collar to the cigarette. Back to the face as Verrett raises his eyebrows-

VERRETT
You're late, Mr.--- ?

TWO-SHOT

TRAVIS
Porter. Travis Porter.

VERRETT
That's a bad habit to get into.

He sees Travis look at the cigarette, snuffs it out on the window sill-

VERRETT
Another bad habit. I believe we have an assembly this morning?

EXT. SCHOOLYARD - DAY

Seven hundred uniformed YOUNG MEN stand in almost straight lines as Father Grant, flanked by his FACULTY, stands at a concrete platform-

GRANT
The stated goal of the Josephite Fathers is to bring the gospel to all, and to work toward the incorporation-

VERRETT

Listening from his place with the other faculty-

GRANT (O.S.)
-of the Negro people into the Church and human society. We at St. Augustine remain dedicated to that goal.

CU GRANT

GRANT
75 percent of you will go on to college. 95 percent of that group will graduate.

BOYS

The Knights inner circle have lined up near each other. Antoine stands behind Touche, ranking him-

ANTOINE
Now don't this nigger look like a reptile about the head?

GRANT (O.S.)
We seek to be the very best at whatever we do- academically, artistically, athletically-

ANTOINE
Look like a armadillo about the face-

TRAVIS
Shut it, Antoine.

GRANT (O.S.)
Over the weekend our basketball team won victory number 28.

CHEERS from the assembled boys. Touche bows to all sides, giving Antoine a dirty look as he turns to face him-

TOUCHE
You dead, pretty boy.

CU GRANT

GRANT
However, we were also handed a defeat. Our petition to integrate the Louisiana High School Atletic Congress-

CU TRAVIS

GRANT (O.S.)
-was denied by a vote of 185 to 11.

TRAVIS (to himself)
Damn.

VERRETT

Frowning-

GRANT (O.S.)
We will hold our heads high-

GRANT, VERRETT

We stack the principal and the newcomer in the same shot, Grant in profile in the FG-

GRANT
-and petition again next year.
(lightens)
And now I'd like to introduce a new addition to our faculty- he'll be taking over Father Redmond's history classes. He's an old friend and one of my favorite students at Seminary. Please welcome Father Paul Verrett.

Verrett steps forward to polite APPLAUSE-

BOYS

Amazed to see a black priest-

TRAVIS
See? I told you.

HEATWAVE
Why would a brother want to be a Father?

They all look at him-

HEATWAVE
You know what I mean.

GRANT (O.S.)
And now, gentlemen, let us lift our voices-

The boys join in SINGING the alma mater- Rise Sons of the Gold and Purple-

TWO SHOT, PRIESTS

Proudly listening to the boys SING, Grant looks over to catch Verrett's eye. Verrett allows himself a slight smile-

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. CLASSROMM - BOYS

Watching uneasily-

VERRETT

Pacing in front on the blackboard, on which he has written '1492' in huge letters. He stops, looks at the class-

VERRETT
Mr. Dapreneaux. Tell me about 1492.

DAP (fresh)
Columbus sailed the ocean blue?

A TITTER from the class-

VERRETT
Why?

DAP (shrugs)
To discover America.

Verrett cruises between the rows of desks-

VERRETT
He find anybody when he got here?

DAP
Indians.

VERRETT
Then how could he 'discover' it?

Dap shrugs, getting nervous-

VERRETT
Mr. Dapreneaux, you'll find that being a member of the basketball squad impresses me much less than it did my predecessor.

Verrett stops by Heatwave and without looking whisks a diagram of a basketball play off the boy's desk. He examines the marks and arrows-

VERRETT
A drawing, Mr. Hundley?

HEATWAVE
Uhm- that's- Columbus's path to the New World?

VERRETT
I see. He gets a nice pick from the off guard here-

LAUGHTER as Verrett crumples the paper and continues walking-

VERRETT
Mr. Porter---- 1492?

Travis straightens, answers from rote memory-

TRAVIS
Pinta, Nina, Santa Maria. Tried to find a route to China, sailed west and-

VERRETT
Why not east? The way they'd been going for decades?

Travis draws a blank. Father Grant enters to stand at the rear, smiling. Verrett sees him but doesn't break rhythm-

VERRETT
Could it be becuase of all the niggers sitting in the way?

BOYS

Heatwave and Antoine exchange a look. The boys behind them come out of their early morning stupor-

GRANT

Smile gone, wondering where this will lead-

VERRETT

Reeling them in-

VERRETT
Or as he might have said to Queen Isabella- "Hay muchos negros entre nosotros y China." Anybody know who the Moors were?

GRANT

Frowns uneasily-

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY - BOYS

Doing a recap on their way to class. Travis holds center frame as the others zigzag around him-

SNOW
Only Moores I know is Reginald and Emory Moore, live down on Tchopitoulas.

HEATWAVE
Naw, man, remember we saw that El Cid? Charlton Heston? The brothers he was fighting against was Moors. Araby-lookin cats-

DAP
This Father V got him some attitude.

SNOW
He don't like b-ball players much. Pickin on us all class- I used to get my beauty sleep in History.

ANTOINE
And you need a truckload of that. Drain this nigger's bathwater and make Ugly Soup.

TRAVIS (serious)
Wonder if he includes the Bible in those books we're not sposed to trust?

SNOW
Ask him that and I bet he smack your nappy head.

The others laugh-

ANTOINE
Brother don't get any pussy he get to be mean.

SNOW
Speakin of which, Denise Givens and her club giving a set in the park-

DAP
Yall can ride with me. Just leave room for one of them project girls-

Dap stops and humps his hips forward a couple times, closing his eyes in mock ecstasy. The others scatter as Verrett and Grant step around the corner. Dap opens his eyes to see the priests watching him-

DAP
Oh. Hey Father G. Father Verrett. I was- uhm- I-

GRANT
Don't even try, Joseph.

DAP
Right. Uhm- see you-

He hurries away and we TRACK in the opposite direction with the priests-

GRANT
It could be very good to have you here, Paul. Give the boys a better- you know-

VERRETT
Role model?

GRANT
Why not?

VERRETT
At seminary you weren't even sure I should be a priest.

GRANT
You were so full of anger-

VERRETT (quotes)
'We're not here to re-enact the Old Testament, Mr. Verrett.'

GRANT
Of the many vows you took when you entered the priesthood, there's one you always seem to forget. Obedience.

VERRETT
People in the neighborhood had been planning that community center for two years. There was no other way to make the diocese listen-

GRANT
Listen, or capitulate? You try those strong-arm tactics here-

VERRETT (defensive)
I'm here to teach history. Period.

GRANT
The Monsignor wanted you out of the order.

This stops Verrett in mid-stride- *

GRANT
Against my better judgement, I asked him to give you another chance. *
(softly)
The Lord likes to put obstacles in our way, Paul, to test us. Maybe coming back here is your test.

VERRETT (deadpan)
And maybe I'm yours. *

INT. CLEARVIEW BARBER SHOP - DAY

We start on a MAN'S HEAD as hair is snipped from it, then PULL BACK to see a black barber shop and its clientel. There are three barber chairs by the long mirror and a half-dozen old wooden chairs against the opposite wall. Howard cuts Wesley's hair while JUKEBOX, a squirrely little guy with a limp and a bad stutter, works on ALPHONSE, a natty shopkeeper. PINKY BREAUX, a huge butcher in his mid-40's waits his turn reading the Picayune. We saw all but Wesley in the Fathers' Club at the basketball game-

PINKY
You was there?

JUKEBOX
My G-g-g-grandaddy was there. He t-t-t-told me about it.

PINKY
He's holdin somebody's mule if he was there at all. Teddy Roosevelt run up San Juan Hill. It's in the books.

JUKEBOX
That's where you been b-b-brainwashed!

The BELL DINGS as Travis enters. All heads turn-

ALPHONSE
Hey, Youngblood! Lookin slick out there last night!

TRAVIS
Evenin, Alphonse. Mr. Breaux-Jukebox-

HOWARD
We need to change the water jug, son. New one's out back.

TRAVIS
Sure thing-

Travis blows through to the rear, the men watching after him-

WESLEY
Boy got some height. Basketball player?

ALPHONSE
Best in the city.

Pinky flaps his newspaper-

PINKY
Not 'cordin to this. That Mike Malone got him 30 points for Jesuit last night. 30.

JUKEBOX
W-what you reading th-th-that for? Travis in the c-c-cullid news.

PINKY
This starts bein a colored world, I'll start readin the colored news.

DING. The two young organizers from the picket line step in. Afros, combat boots, denim pants and Army surplus jackets- a pair of New Yorkers. Stacks of flyers in their hand. The men look at them silently-

ROD
How youse doin this afternoon?

No response-

ROD
I'm Rod, this is Ernest. We're from SNCC?
(pronounces it 'snick')

Pinky slaps his belly-

PINKY
Yeah? I'm from snack.

The men LAUGH as Travis steps back in lugging a full water-cooler jug. He crosses to replace the empty, tuning in on the visitors without looking at them-

ERNEST
Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee. We'd like to give you some information.

ROD
It's about voter registration-

BLANCHARD (O.S.)
Yall can't give us nothing. Not in here.

We PAN to the rear where MR. BLANCHARD, the owner of the shop, has stepped out-

ROD (O.S.)
It's just information, sir.

BLANCHARD
And I can't have it in my shop. Yall better leave.

ERNEST
Anybody?

Ernest holds a flyer out toward Howard. Howard thinks about taking it, hesitates-

TRAVIS

Watching his father-

HOWARD

He catches Mr. Blanchard's look, drops his hand-

TRAVIS

Disappointed, goes back to the water-cooler job-

ROD (O.S.)
Well, youse have a good day-

BLANCHARD

The old man turns to go back in his room. We hear the DING of the organizers leaving. The men react-

ALPHONSE
Young ones for up North has gotten impoytenant.

HOWARD
I'm just happy they didn't want a cut. Be in those heads all day.

The men LAUGH. Howard searches out his son's eyes- Travis isn't laughing-

TRAVIS
They're just trying to get people to vote.

HOWARD
That aint all they after.

TRAVIS
I saw them before, marching by that Woolworth lunch counter.

PINKY
Son, you ever eat at a Woolworth? If that's freedom, you can have it.

All the men LAUGH but for Jukebox-

JUKEBOX
Yall is just b-b-b-brainwashed!

EXT. PLAYGROUND - NIGHT *

Little Ricky sits on a milk crate by the top of the key as Travis shoots baskets by the glow of a STREETLIGHT. Little Ricky is high, floating in a haze- *

LITTLE RICKY *
You got to pick your game, see. Play it on your terms. Schooling, books, all that- that's their world, they own that shit. And they set it up so a brother don't hold a chance. It's a fake-out, see- they let you get so far, cruisin along, then WHAM! Light's out, baby. Man, I didn't know what hit me when they pulled that rug out. You just take care of business on that hardwood, T- *

TRAVIS *

Back to the basket dribbling as he listens- *

LITTLE RICKY (O.S.) *
-and then they come crawlin to you. *

Travis pivots and throws in a reverse lay-up- *

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY - SNOW *

Snow sits up with his eyes closed, asleep- *

VERRETT (O.S.)
Mr. Lutcher? Mr. Lutcher- *

HEATWAVE (hisses)
Snow! Wake up! *

SNOW (startled)
Huh?

We SHIFT to see Father Verrett standing over Snow-

VERRETT
Nice of you to join us. Who coined the phrase 'the white man's burden'?

SNOW
Uhm-----

We FOLLOW Verrett as he strolls back to the head of the class-

VERRETT (quotes)
'So pick up the white man's burden/ The silent, sullen peoples/ Will thank your God and you'

He turns to face the class-

VERRETT
Rudyard Kipling. At the end of the Spanish American War, the accepted knowlege was that white, Christian nations had to 'civilize' their darker brethren.
(suddenly)
Mr. Dapreneaux, your lights are on but I don't believe anybody is home-

LAUGHTER-

DAP
Sorry, Father. There's- you know- we got a game tonight.

VERRETT
Okay- maybe a question about the sporting world. Who said 'They're all right for the sprints but they can't handle the long distances.'?

Most of the boys have heard this one before-

DAP
Chick Viola?

LAUGHTER-

VERRETT
And who, may I ask, is that?

TRAVIS
Man who writes about sports for the Picayune. About white people sports.

VERRETT
They have a seperate section for Negros?

SNOW
Don't have no section at all.

VERRETT
I see. Mr. Hundley, yesterday I asked you to look in your textbook for information about the Moors. What did you find?

HEATWAVE
Said they were on the other side in the Crusades.

VERRETT
That's all?

HEATWAVE
That's all.

VERRETT
Perhaps someone can tell me why one of the most developed and powerful civilizations in the ancient world is mentioned but once in passing by the editors of our textbook?

TRAVIS
Cause the Moors were colored?

VERRETT
So our city's leading newspaper and Exploring World History have something in common-

TRAVIS
That's right.

VERRETT (waves book)
What anyone writes is determined by how they see the world- by their prejudices as well as their knowlege. Our textbook here is no exception.

He drops the history book with a thud, then lifts a magazine photo from his desk to show. A smiling African runner with an orange baseball cap on his head-

VERRETT
Who is the gentleman in the orange hat?

HEATWAVE
Kip Keino.

VERRETT
What event?

HEATWAVE
Miler. He's chasing Jim Ryan-

VERRETT
And what nation does he run for?

HEATWAVE
Kenya?

VERRETT
Who is the president of Kenya?

Heatwave draws a blank-

VERRETT
Jomo Kenyatta. By Monday you will be able to tell us all how he attained that office. I suggest a visit to the public library.

Verrett lifts another magazine photo of a sleek, serious African runner-

VERRETT
And this gentleman?

ANTOINE
Abebe Bikila. Man took the marathon in the Olympics.

VERRETT
What distance is the marathon?

ANTOINE
26.22 miles.

VERRETT
26 point 22? This from a student who tells me he can't remember dates?

LAUGHTER-

VERRETT
What nation does he compete for?

ANTOINE
Addis Abbaba?

VERRETT
That's a city-

TOUCHE (quietly)
Ethiopia.

The whole class turns to look at him. It's more than he's said in class all year-

VERRETT
He not only talks, he utters a five-syllable word. Correct, Mr. Washington. And the ruler of Ethiopia?

Touche shrugs-

VERRETT
Haile Selassie, Lion of Judah. By Monday you will tell us all how long Haile Selassie has held this title. In fact-

Verrett pulls a wall map of Africa (1965 borders) down over the one of Europe-

VERRETT
-I believe we have enough nations here for each one of you to make a report.

The class GROANS. Travis holds his hand up-

VERRETT
Mr. Porter? Is this going to interfere with your basketball career?

TRAVIS (serious)
I just wondered if I could have the Congo?

VERRETT (smiles)
I believe King Leopold of Belgium said the very same thing. It's called Zaire now. Of course you may. (turns) Now who would like to handle Nigeria?

INT. BAR - NIGHT - CU TV SET

Flip Wilson is on a variety show, doing a bit about Columbus in his 'Geraldine' persona-

FLIP (TV)
You can't discover nobody don't wanna be discovered! Yall better discover yourself on outa here!

COUNTER - MEN

A bunch of white MEN LAUGH, watching from their stools. We're in a sports bar, signed pictures of white Louisiana athletes pasted all over the place. Bob Pettit is featured, aiming a foul shot. CHICK VIOLA, a sportswriter in his early 30's with Italian-French coloring and a watchful, sardonic manner, is holding court-

CHICK
This guy kills me.

MALONE SR.
I like the other one better.
Whatsisname- Crosby.

TURK
On the spy show.

MALONE SR.
Right.

Mike MALONE SR. is beefy and red-haired. He looks to the TV-

MALONE SR.
This one sounds just like the lady
used to clean our house.

TURK
So Chick- the Final Four?

CHICK
Oh-- UCLA, Kentucky, UTEP, and maybe Duke or Loyola. Kentucky'll take it. Bright kids, good coach- none of this jungle-bunny stuff.

TURK
You seen this Maravich kid play?

CHICK
Just a hot dog. He should take it down to the projects, play with the colored boys. No, the real class in this town is Mike's kid-

MALONE SR. (touched)
Chick-

CHICK
It's true. As much of a bum as his old man is-

Malone LAUGHS-

CHICK
I talked to Ralph Landry at Tulane- their tongues are hanging out.

MALONE SR.
I wouldn't mind Tulane for him. Close to home-

VERRETT (O.S.)
Excuse me.

They swivel to look. There stands Father Verrett-

VERRETT
Chick Viola?

Chick gives Turk and Malone a what-have-we-here? look-

CHICK
What can I do for you, Captain?

VERRETT
I'm Father Paul Verrett from St. Augustine High. I was wondering-

CHICK
You're a Catholic priest?

VERRETT
That's right. I was wondering how a major high school with an undefeated-

CHICK
I never seen a colored priest. I took you for a regular old colored preacher. Baptist or something.

VERRETT
How do we not rate a single line in your entire sports section?

CHICK (stiffens)
How much space do white teams get in the Louisiana Weekly? You take care of yours, we take care of ours. *

VERRETT
It's the same game isn't it? The same rules, the same-

CHICK
Not around here it isn't. I know you got some real high-steppers over there at St. Augie's, but you put them on the floor with a disciplined white squad-

VERRETT
Why don't we do that?

Chick and the others look at him incredulously. Finally Chick leans forward, lowering his voice in a conspiratorial manner-

CHICK
Just between you and me, Father- they'll be ice-skating in Hell before that happens. Good evening.

He swivels his stool around and the other two follow. Verrett stares at their backs for a moment, furious, then walks out-

CU CHICK

Anger and a profound unease show on his face-

MALONE SR. (O.S.)
They gettin flat outa hand, aren't they?

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Father Grant catches up to Father Verrett in the hallway-

GRANT
Father-

VERRETT
Father?

GRANT
I heard about your Africa thing-

VERRETT (defensive)
And?

GRANT
It's a great idea- but- there aren't any questions about Africa on the State finals. I appreciate that it's interesting information for the students to have, but if our scores start going down-

VERRETT
There won't be any scores going down. Not in my classes.

Grant sees Verrett's determination, accepts it for the moment-

GRANT
Let's hope not. We had an unusual phone call this morning. A sportswriter checking to see if we had a Father Verrett-

VERRETT
Chick Viola.

GRANT
I didn't think you were interested in sports.

VERRETT
I'm not, especially. I think they're overemphasized.

GRANT
They build pride-

VERRETT
There are better things to be proud of.

GRANT
You'll be coming to the game tonight.

Verrett scowls-

GRANT (smiles)
For your sins.

INT. GYM - NIGHT

We are in another old gym, the game in full swing. Travis gets the ball with his back to the basket, 10 feet from the hoop. He fakes right, whirls and throws up a jumper that bounces off the rim but is tapped in by Touche, whose man hasn't blocked him out-

STANDS - FATHERS' CLUB

Howard and his cronies cheering-

PINKY
Go Touche!

BENCH

Coach Connor on his feet, yelling and waving-

CONNOR
Get back! Get back! Get back!

COURT

Dap is alone guarding a two-on-one break. He fakes toward the driving ballhandler, who passes to the trailer too soon and Dap deflects the ball to Antoine, who baseball passes it down to Travis, dogging at his own foul line. Travis turns and drills a jumpshot-

STANDS - MOMMIT AND THELMA

MOMMIT
What happen? What they do?

THELMA
Joe Dapreneaux stole the ball and they threw it to Travis for 2.

MOMMIT
16. Travis got 16.

SCORER'S TABLE

Father Grant and Father Verrett sit just behind the scorer's table, watching the action go back and forth-

GRANT
Not much of a contest, is it?

VERRETT
They're only ten behind. They shouldn't be within twenty. Doesn't he run any plays?

GRANT
We haven't lost a game all year with these boys.

VERRETT
Who are those two?

Grant looks down the row-

HIS POV - MEN

A pair of WHITE MEN in identical blazers sit two rows behind the Knights' bench-

GRANT (O.S.)
I have no idea.

BRRRRAAAAAAAP! The halftime BUZZER SOUNDS and the fans CHEER as the boys head for the dressing room. The two white men step down to talk to Connor, who nods a couple times, then looks over to the priests. He walks up into a three-shot-

CONNOR
Father Grant? We need to talk.

Verrett senses he's not a party to the conversation. We FOLLOW him away, back through the milling CROWD to an open spot behind the stands. He digs out a cigarette, lights up-

HOWARD (O.S.)
No smoking in here, my man.

Verrett turns and there is Howard. Howard is surprised by the clerical collar-

HOWARD
Oh. Father-- ?

VERRETT
Verrett. Sorry.

He snuffs the cigarette-

HOWARD (shrugs)
Fire code. So you're the colored father-

VERRETT
They should make me an attraction on the bus tour.

HOWARD
My son says you give out the most homework. That's good.

VERRETT
What's your son's name?

HOWARD
Travis Porter. That's him out there. Isn't he something?

VERRETT
College recruiters sniffing around?

HOWARD
Grambling, Southern, Morgan State- all the colored schools. Got his mind set on going North, though. Integrated schools.

VERRETT
He shouldn't have to go North for that.

HOWARD (smiles)
Where you from, Father?

VERRETT
Baltimore, most recently.

HOWARD
Well down here should and is are a long ways apart. You watch Travis tonight- he's going for 32- show that big redboy at Jesuit about some points.

SCORER'S TABLE - ECU BUZZER

The timekeeper's hand presses down- BRRRRAAAAAP! The second half is about to start-

STANDS

Grant, worried, steps in to sit by Verrett-

VERRETT
Something wrong?

GRANT
Lefty Simmons, the coach over at Lafayette Junior College, had a stroke yesterday. Connor is taking the job. Starts tomorrow.

Verrett shakes his head, looks out to the floor-

COURT - CU BALL

We FOLLOW the ball as the ref tosses it up for center jump. Touche tips it to Snow who throws it long off the backboard, bouncing into the hands of Travis, already breaking on the tip. Travis takes a long step and JAMS the ball viciously. The CROWD goes wild as he comes down and pumps his arms over his head-

INT. DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

Just a classroom with some racks to hang clothes on. We PAN SLOWLY around at the long faces of the sweat-soaked players, still in their uniforms as they hear the news-

CONNOR (O.S.)
-an opportunity that quite frankly isn't likely to come again to someone my age in this game. If I didn't think you fellas could breeze through the playoffs on your own steam I'd never make this move. Coaching you young men-

We reach Connor, sincere but abandoning ship nonetheless. Grant and Verrett stand several feet behind him-

CONNOR
-has been one of the great privileges of my life, and I don't think I'm exaggerating to say you're the best darn colored team this state has ever seen.

He looks around at the Knights-

BOYS

We look over Connor's shoulder at the team. A pretty chilly audience-

CONNOR

Uncomfortable. This isn't his team anymore-

CONNOR
Good luck to you fellas.

He turns and walks out. Grant steps up-

GRANT
I'll try to have somebody to fill in by Monday. Sorry.

He exits as well. Verrett starts out, then hangs in the doorway to listen-

BOYS

They've been sold out and they know it-

SNOW
Lafayette Junior, man. Them pussies can't play no roundball! Bunch of patty-cakin pass-and-pick Clyde Lovelette set-shootin lame-ass-

DAP
They white though.

SNOW
Course they white! Man not gonna move up in the world coachin colored ball in Luziana!

TRAVIS
We don't need him.

ANTOINE
Well he don't need us, that's for damn sure.

CU VERRETT

Listening, troubled-

TRAVIS (O.S.)
Aint no big thing anyway. We only play each other, and we aint shit.

We hear a CHAIR being KICKED. Verrett closes the door, gently-

EXT. FROSTY FREEZ - NIGHT

Travis, Snow and Dap, in low spirits, stand in a line of BLACK KIDS outside the take-out window with COLETTE, DIONNE and ANGELIQUE. A young WHITE COUPLE pass on their way in and we see the place is full of WHITE KIDS. Segregated-

DAP
Where'd Antoine go?

SNOW
Where you think he went? My boy sniff somethin out, now he's gettin on it. *

DIONNE
Yall are awful-

TRAVIS
We oughta go inside.

They all look at him-

TRAVIS
No, really. Other people been doing it-

DAP
Other people been gettin they heads cracked open-

ANGELIQUE
Those three they just killed- two of em was even white.

TRAVIS
We're payin the same money for the same ice cream-

SNOW
Travis all fulla ideas cause his parents never told him he was a nigger.

COLETTE
Don't say that.

SNOW
Huh! Boy's so black his mama feed him buttermilk so he don't pee ink, and here he is-

DAP (points)
Hush up, man. Look-

THEIR POV - INT. FROSTY FREEZ

At a rear table MIKE MALONE and the Jesuit point guard, JERRY, sit with a white MAN in a green blazer-

DAP (O.S.)
That's Ralph Landry they talkin to. The Tulane coach. That gym is like a palace, man-

SNOW (O.S.)
Isn't any Tulane gonna recruit your black ass. You best start learning how to ski, brother.

OUTSIDE

The girls watching the boy press their noses to the window-

DIONNE
Yall are just jealous.

SNOW (musing)
They got it so easy.

TRAVIS
Say what?

SNOW
They got it so easy. Colored man got to walk through the gates of hell to get a piece of cheese.

We PAN with their gaze to see WHITE BOYS in spiffy Jesuit High letter jackets come out from inside. Mike Malone Jr. is at least 6'9", red-haired like his father, tough-looking. His eyes drill through the St. Augustine boys-

DAP (whispers)
That's Malone.

Mike hard-eyes Travis as he goes past. Snow looks like he's going to bust a seam-

COLETTE
He's big.

SNOW
Big ole rusty-headed duck-footed cabbage-eatin two-hand-dribblin ham-and-egg o-rang-o-tang! I had me an axe I chop that ugly thing down! That chump be out there with his big nasty butt to the hoop, catch the ball, turn round and toss it five inches- booshit, man! Get the dude in the open court he's corn beef, man, make him look sick!

TRAVIS
He had 30 against Immaculate Conception last night-

SNOW
Aint no big thing! Travis, you'd eat his Irish ass for lunch!

Travis turns away to watch the Jesuit boys get into their car and pull away.. He grows somber-

TRAVIS
We won't ever know for sure, will we?

EXT. LEVEE - NIGHT

Later. Travis walks along the water with Colette. He's doing some heavy thinking-

TRAVIS
I'm going North.

COLETTE
You are?

TRAVIS
Can't get nowhere down here.

COLETTE
You mean in basketball?

TRAVIS
I mean in anything. People down here are backwards.

COLETTE
Thanks.

TRAVIS
I don't mean you. These two guys come into my daddy's shop today- they from that SNC-
(pronounces 'sink')

COLETTE
SNCC.
('snick')

TRAVIS
Yeah. Northern guys, real cool. My Daddy and his old burrhead friends froze em out.

COLETTE
They aren't only from the North. My cousin joined up when-

TRAVIS
My Daddy had any balls he wouldn't put up with this mess.

Colette frowns, walks with him a moment-

COLETTE
So you gonna run away?

TRAVIS
Who said anything about running?

COLETTE
S'what it sounded like to me.

TRAVIS
I can play with anybody- why should I get buried down here with these-

COLETTE
What happens to the rest of us? I can't get any basketball scholarship! If everybody runs off instead of fighting it out here-

TRAVIS
You think that's gonna do any good? People get their heads beat in, get dogs put on em-

COLETTE
Least they care about somebody besides theirself!

TRAVIS
I care about you-

COLETTE
Forget it!

She stomps away. Travis lets her go. He kicks a stone into the river-

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Grant and Verrett walk toward the door to the rear playground-

GRANT
I tried everybody in the Fathers' Club- they're all working men.

VERRETT
Anybody outside the parish?

GRANT
You know how little we were paying Coach Connor? Anyway, somebody had to fill in-

They push through the door and squint against the 3 o'clock sun-

EXT. PLAYGROUND - DAY

SISTER GONZAGA, a burly nun in full habit, BLOWS her WHISTLE and bellows past the camera-

SISTER GONZAGA
Look lively, gang! We're draggin out here!

Travis, Snow and some of the others lope by, running a half-hearted break-

GRANT AND VERRETT

Watching the practice by the door-

GRANT
Sister Gonzaga runs a tight ship, but she's never really had a grasp on the zone defense. So--

Sister Gonzaga limps over to talk to Father Grant-

SISTER GONZAGA
It's my legs, Father. All day in the classroom, up and down to the blackboard, then out on this hard cement-

GRANT
I understand, Sister. We've found a volunteer.

Grant takes the whistle from Sister G and hands it to Verrett. Verritt is horrified-

VERRETT
Oh no-

GRANT
Obedience, Father Verrett- *

VERRETT
This isn't fair-

GRANT
Offer it up. Boys!

PLAYGROUND - TEAM

Looking on skeptically as Father Verrett stands before them holding the basketball. Father Grant watches from behind. The boys shift uneasily-

SNOW
You ever play this game, Father?

VERRETT
A long time ago.
(sighs)
Okay, first team on the court, man-to-man, second team I want you in a 2-1-2 zone. Let's see some hustle-

He tosses the ball to Snow and heads for the sidelines, Heatwave following him-

VERRETT
Mr. Hundley-

HEATWAVE
Father?

VERRETT
Stay close.

COURT

The squads play. Touche pulls down a rebound, kicks to Snow and the first team starts down the court. Second team is back in their zone. Snow passes to Travis in the corner, who fakes baseline, drives to the middle collecting three defenders and somehow sinks a fall-away jumpshot-

SIDELINE

Verrett tries twice to blow his whistle but can't get much out. He hands it to Heatwave, who BLOWS- TWEEEEEEE! The players stop in their tracks. Verrett steps out and takes the ball, faces Travis-

VERRETT
What was that, Mr. Porter?

TRAVIS
Two points?

VERRETT
What are they playing?

TRAVIS
2-1-2 zone.

VERRETT
And you drive into the zone and shoot before our rebounders are in position?

TRAVIS
I saw a seam. Anyway, I made the shot-

VERRETT
I see. All of first team off the court except Mr. Porter.

The players look at him-

VERRETT
Move.

The others leave the court. Verrett gives Travis a hard look, tosses the ball to Ice and steps away-

VERRETT
Play ball, gentlemen.

GRANT

He understands what's going on, smiles uneasily-

COURT

Ice passes to a man underneath, drawing Travis in to guard but then kicks it back to Ice who drills a basket from the foul line. The defense runs back. Travis, alone, picks up the ball and dribbles downcourt-

SIDELINE

Heatwave watches Verrett's face as he watches the court-

COURT

Travis tries to drive a few times, is stopped by the zone-

VERRETT (calling)
Press him!

The second team converges on Travis, who has nobody to pass to. They strip the ball and a reserve guard goes down for an uncontested lay-up. Verritt steps out to Travis-

VERRETT
Tough to do it on your own, isn't it?

Travis looks away, embarrassed and angry-

TRAVIS
You made your point.

VERRETT
You score 20, 30, 40 points, whatever, it doesn't mean a thing if we lose.

TRAVIS (mutters)
We don't lose.

VERRETT
You think you could throw this jog-and-pop stuff up against a team like Jesuit and win?

Travis looks at Verrett, challenging-

TRAVIS
We're not playing Jesuit.

VERRETT
Yes we are.

The sentence hangs there for a moment before all realize what has been said-

FATHER GRANT

Frowning, stepping closer to hear what's happening- *

COURT

The players tighten around Father Verrett. He's definitely got their attention-

SNOW
Since when?

Verrett has laid it in the open now. He shoots a look to Grant, plunges ahead-

VERRETT
That's our problem. Your problem is to get your sorry asses in gear and play like a team, not a slow-motion train wreck.
(walking away)
First squad back on, and I want to see three passes, three, before anything goes flying at the net!

Grant steps up beside him as the boys run back onto the court.

The two keep their eyes on the team and hiss in whispers-

GRANT
How could you do that? How could you promise that?

VERRETT
You want me to coach a team? Fine- I'll take it as an opportunity, not a punishment. But if I'm going to do it-

GRANT
We have no control over the-

VERRETT
I didn't say I was going to integrate the whole conference. One game, one exhibition, scrimmage- whatever you want to call it- against another one of our own schools. That won't be so hard, will it?

Grant just shakes his head-

VERRETT (not so sure)
Will it?

GRANT
These things take time. Even within the church-

VERRETT
Time has just about run out! If we don't show some backbone we're going to lose our young people!

GRANT
If we disappoint these boys-

VERRETT
The only way we disappoint them is by not trying to put right what's wrong. You taught me that.

A silence. Verrett has scored with this last statement. Grant thinks, sighs-

GRANT
If I can get our schools in the diocese together without the Archbishop getting wind of it--- just keep things calm, alright? I don't want this going public before we can make our case. *

VERRETT
Understood.

Grant relaxes a bit, relieved not to be arguing-

GRANT
You know what you're doing out here?

VERRETT
Vaguely.

GRANT
Anything I can do to help?

VERRETT
Prayer would be nice.

EXT. COURT - EVENING

LIGHTS illuminate the court as the players pass by on their way to the dressing room, tired and still unsure of their new coach-

SNOW
I think the man is crazy.

DAP
I got new blisters. It's too late in the season to be getting new blisters.

TRAVIS
Think about Jesuit, man. That'd be something.

SNOW
The man's mouth done signed a check his ass can't cash.

They pass by and we see there is only one player left on the court-

CLOSER - ICE

Ice is on the line, shooting foul shots as Heatwave feeds him the ball. He's like a machine, nothing but net. Verrett pauses to watch on his way in. He stands right next to Ice, nearly brushing his arm. Ice seems not to notice, swishing two more. Verrett leans in close to look into Ice's eyes-

VERRETT
You've got a nice foul shot.

ICE
Uh-huh.

Swish!

VERRETT
Pressure get to you?

Ice turns his head, the priest's nose inches from his. He gives him a blank look, then turns, shoots-

ICE
No.

Swish!

INT. CLASS - DAY - TOUCHE

Standing up self-consciously delivering his report-

TOUCHE
His name then was Ras Tafari, but when he got to be the big man it changed to Haile Selassie. My aunt used to worship him.

CLASS

Verrett leans back with his arms behind his head, enjoying this. The map of Africa is pulled down behind him-

VERRETT
Worship?

TOUCHE
This Jamaican cat put her on to him.

VERRETT
Your aunt was a Garveyite.

TOUCHE
She was a something-ite. My granmama still don't let her in the house.

LAUGHTER. The BELL RINGS-

VERRETT
That was excellent, Mr. Washington. We'll continue our exploration tomorrow-

The boys file out. Verrett sees Travis sitting, lost in thought. When he hauls to his feet Verrett calls him-

VERRETT
Travis? *

TRAVIS
Yeah? *

VERRETT *
You're aware that you're failing this *
class- *

THELMA *
Father Redmond- *

VERRETT
It has nothing to do with Father Redmond. It has to do with your lack of effort.

Verrett lifts a couple paperbacks off his desk-

VERRETT
I've got a little reading for you.

TRAVIS
Books?

VERRETT
Your cumulative record says you've done a report on the same book for the last three years. The Jim Thorpe Story. I think you should expand your horizons.

TRAVIS (reads)
James Baldwin. This an assignment?

VERRETT
You have one week to read these and hand me a five-page report on each-

TRAVIS
But we've got-

VERRETT
If your work is unsatisfactory, you will be suspended from the team. Is that clear?

TRAVIS
You wouldn't dare.

VERRETT
You'll find, Mr. Porter, that there is very little that I wouldn't dare. Those are important books- this is an opportunity, not a punishment.

Travis looks at the books in his hand, scowling-

TRAVIS
Five pages-

VERRETT
Each.

Travis looks at Verrett with a touch of insolence-

VERRETT
Single spaced or double?

GRANT

Smiles, moves on-

INT. TRAVIS'S ROOM - NIGHT

Travis lies on his belly reading The Fire Next Time. Nobody Knows my Name is on the sheets beside him. A huge picture of Sweetwater Clifton jumping with a basketball in hand hangs over the bed. Wilson Pickett SINGS on the little transistor radio on the bedstand. Thelma calls from downstairs-

THELMA (O.S.)
Travis? You turn that noise down!

Travis absently turns the radio way down, engrossed in what he's reading-

THELMA (O.S.)
You doing your homework?

TRAVIS
Done it.

THELMA (O.S.)
What you up to then?

TRAVIS
Reading.

HOWARD (O.S.)
You got my Sports Illustrated up there?

TRAVIS
Reading a book.

A silence. Then Thelma, just loud enough to be heard-

THELMA (O.S.)
That'll be the day.

Travis keeps reading-

INT. ST. IGNATIUS CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

A meeting of the Catholic principals of the archdiocese. Besides Verrett all are white men but for SISTER MARIE CLAIRE from Redemptorist. FATHER MCMANUS, the Jesuit principal, is speaking-

FATHER MCMANUS
We understand the principle involved, Father Verrett. But the majority of our parents aren't ready for this sort of thing.

VERRETT
How do you know that until you try?

FATHER COLE
I think we have a very good idea of the mood in our own community.

SISTER MARIE CLAIRE
Has the Archbishop been told about this idea?

GRANT
We thought it would be best to leave him out of this.

FATHER MCMANUS
If he's not on board I don't think we could help you even if we wanted to. Our job as I see it is education, is religious instruction. You start bringing politics into it and-

VERRETT
Politics?

GRANT
Father Verrett-

VERRETT
When did morality become politics?

FATHER MCMANUS
Don't get on your high horse- we'll run it by our parents' group-

VERRETT
But they'll only say-

FATHER MCMANUS
Prejudice is a terrible thing, Father Verrett. We mustn't condemn people before they've had their chance.

Verrett stands, his face tight-

VERRETT
Then there's no use talking about it anymore, is there?

He marches out. Grant gives them an apologetic look-

SISTER MARIE CLAIRE
He's in such a hurry.

GRANT
They've been waiting a long time.

INT. STAIRWAY - DAY

Father Grant catches up to Father Verrett on the stairs leading out of the building-

GRANT
Your manners could use some work, Father.

VERRETT (still angry)
I don't see how you can sit and listen to that cop-out-

GRANT
It's called diplomacy. If you're going to get anywhere with-

VERRETT
I know, I know- a smile and a shoeshine.

Grant just gives him a reproachful look-

VERRETT
Sorry.

GRANT
Attacking your friends won't get you anywhere.

VERRETT
You think we made a dent?

GRANT
Charlie McManus had that guilty look-
(smiles)
The Jesuits are suckers for a good moral argument.

EXT. ROSENWALD PLAYGROUND - DAY

Court after concrete court full of black PLAYERS of various shapes and sizes, all surrounded by a high chain-link fence.

Travis, Snow and Dap strut onto the yard, slapping five and trading elbow daps with players warming up on the 'A' court. Little Ricky and Clanky watch from the side, Clanky with a bottle in a bag-

LITTLE RICKY
Hey- Easy Money! Yall big shots gonna run with us?

TRAVIS
Naw, man. Got a game tonight.

DAP
Could be the last chance for your sorry ass to come check us out.

LITTLE RICKY
No can do, my niggers. My duckets aint right. Got to buy my shit.

TRAVIS
Thought you were through with that smack, man.

LITTLE RICKY
Methadone, baby. I'm on the Method. Comin clean- you know---

He LAUGHS. Travis isn't reassured-

CLANKY
I hope you bein rough on em, T. Cause out here you be tiptoing round like some punk-ass girl.

Travis stares hard at Clanky as there is LAUGHTER from some of the crowd on the court. Little Ricky tries to defuse it

LITTLE RICKY
Need to play more with us, toughen you up some.

A ball bounces toward Little Ricky. He grabs it and lets go a thirty footer- CHING! It falls through the chain net like a mortar shell-

CLANKY
Ouch!

LITTLE RICKY
See that? Get my health together, gonna call the Sixers and ole Chet Walker be polishin the pine, cause they know my shit is tight!

A SCREECH of BRAKES turns their heads-

THEIR POV - STREET

A convertible with five white BOYS in khaki uniforms. Jesuit boys- including Jerry the point guard and Mike Malone in the rear. All but Malone jump out, leaving the engine running-

TRAVIS

Walking toward the fence, staring at Malone-

SNOW (O.S.)
What they up to?

MIKE

He looks at Travis, frowning, not wanting to be here-

WIDER

The white boys begin to HOOT and JUMP around like chimpanzees, scratching under their arms, not venturing too far from the car. Every game within the cage of fencing has stopped to watch-

CLANKY
Let's kill the motherfuckers!

The boys on the court break for the two gates, while a few jump onto the fence and start to climb, SCREAMING INSULTS. We PAN to see the white boys jump into the convertible and PATCH OUT, burning rubber down the street-

TRAVIS, SNOW, DAP

The three watch up next to the fence-

SNOW
Father V get us on a court with them, man, we got to kick some serious butt.

EXT. ROAD - EVENING

The old school bus winds down a road through flat swampland-

INT. BUS - EVENING

Father Verrett is driving, Heatwave riding shotgun with a playbook he's made-

HEATWAVE
Okay- point man drives, dishes to the wing, wing hits the post when he pops off a pick to the line-

VERRETT
Boston?

HEATWAVE
Cincinnatti. These Baptist boys are tough, Father. If you don't know the plays, how are the guys-

VERRETT
Try me again.

HEATWAVE (sighs)
What's Kansas City?

VERRETT
Kansas City, Kansas or Kansas City, Missouri?

Heatwave puts his head in his hands-

VERRETT
That was a joke. Listen, you think a play is right, just tell it to me.

HEATWAVE
Really?

VERRETT
You're part of this team, aren't you?

Heatwave beams-

HEATWAVE
Right. I am.

REAR OF BUS

Travis sits going through his card collection, ritually reading the name of the player and pressing it to his chest-

TRAVIS
Bill Russell-- K.C. Jones--- Walt Hazzard--- Nate Thurmond---

ANTOINE
Man, look- Travis discovered hisself the eight Sacrament!

SNOW
Lemme see that-

Snow reaches for a card but Travis snatches his wrist in mid-air and holds it, giving a warning look-

TRAVIS
World got no use for a one-handed point guard.

ANTOINE
Don't be touchin Travis holy relics, Snow. Man is serious.

INT. LINCOLN HIGH GYM - NIGHT

The game in full swing, CHEERLEADERS CHANTING, CROWD YELLING, teams running up and down-

STANDS

Father Grant and a few FACULTY watch, tense. Behind them are several members of the FATHERS' CLUB. Grant looks up at the scoreboard-

SCOREBOARD

1:13 left to play, St. Aug 74, Lincoln 73-

BENCH

Verrett on his feet, totally into the game-

VERRETT
Set it up fellas! Travis stop forcing it! Heatwave- I need a play-

HEATWAVE
They're back in man- uhm- Louisville!

VERRETT
Louisville! Louisville!

COURT

Snow has the ball at the top of the key. He nods to Verrett, pumps his arm over his head twice to signal the others, then drives right. Travis comes up to pick Snow's defender and Snow motors past, drawing both Travis's man and a defender from the right- leaving Antoine unguarded in the corner. Snow goes up, flicks it out to Antoine. Antoine has a beautiful stroke on his jumper- SWISH!

BENCH

The small section of St. Augustine supporters behind the bench CHEER-

VERRETT
Get back, get back!

The players hustle back past him. He turns to Heatwave-

VERRETT
This is too close. It shouldn't be this close.

HEATWAVE
Tell me about it.

COURT

The Lincoln players spread the court, then kick in to their enormous center, who fakes Touche one way and makes an easy hook going the other-

SCOREBOARD

:57 to play, St. Aug 76, Lincoln 75

BENCH

VERRETT
Four corners! Let's kill some time!

COURT

The Purple Knights spread out and begin a game of keep-away with the ball, defenders running from one post to the other trying for a steal or trap. Finally they have to foul Dap and the ref BLOWS his WHISTLE-

VERRETT

Eyeing the clock as he claps encouragement-

VERRETT
Attaboy, Joseph! We got one-and-one!

STANDS - THELMA AND MOMMIT

MOMMIT
What's it? What's that whistle?

THELMA
Joe Dapreneaux shoots one-and-one.

MOMMIT
That boy gone pee his pants in this pressure!

COURT

Dap's preparation on the foul line is like an old Art Carney routine. He wipes his hands on his pants, crosses himself, dribbles three times, looks at the rim, dribbles again, sighs, crouches with the ball next to his ear, loosens his shoulders, finally shoots- and shanks it between rim and backboard so hard the rebound comes back to Travis! Travis fakes up, dribbles back and tries to bank it- no good! A Lincoln player grabs the rebound and throws to a teammate breaking away- Snow dives to foul the man, preventing an easy lay-up!

BENCH

VERRETT
No, no, no, no!

COURT

The Lincoln player HITS the first foul shot to great CHEERS from the home FANS. He is tentative on the second, but it rolls around, around- and IN.

SCOREBOARD

:17 to play. St. Aug 76, Lincoln 77

VERRETT

He signals for a time-out and the WHISTLE BLOWS again. The team trots over. Verrett just looks at Travis-

TRAVIS (defensive)
I had a shot.

VERRETT
We didn't need a shot, we needed the ball. You've been gunning for yourself all night-

TRAVIS
Father, you know history- I know basketball-

VERRETT
You sit.

Travis and the others stare at him-

VERRETT
Isaac, you're in-

TRAVIS
Ice is a guard!

VERRETT (snaps)
Sit.

Travis sits sullenly as Verrett kneels to describe the play-

STANDS

Everybody in the Father's Club is on their feet-

PINKY
What's Travis sittin for?

HOWARD
He shouldn't have took that last shot.

PINKY
So?

COURT

The BUZZER SOUNDS and the team takes their places on the floor. We hear the Lincoln coach calling 'No fouls, no fouls!'. Touche takes the ball under the basket. Snow and Dap set a double pick to free Ice, who takes the ball on a bounce pass. The four other Purple Knights hang by the sidelines, giving Ice a one-on-one full court run at his defender. He switches hands, dribbles behind his back, turns on the speed, a half step ahead of his man who HACKS him from behind hard enough to knock him to the floor before he can get a shot off. The BUZZER SOUNDS just after the WHISTLE calling the foul-

STANDS

Everyone on their feet, confused. Is the game over or not?

COURT

The REFEREE waving his arms to keep fans off the floor. He calls for the ball, steps to the foul line-

REFEREE
Number fifteen shoots one-and-one!
Everybody else clear the court!

Ice pulls himself to his feet as the other players step off-

STANDS - MOMMIT AND THELMA

Thelma filling her mother in-

THELMA
Isaac Gaineswith got fouled on the drive.

MOMMIT
Good. That boy got some stones.

FOUL LINE

Ice takes the ball and calmly looks at the rim-

BENCH

Verrett, turning his face from the floor, catches Heatwave looking at him from the next chair-

HEATWAVE
Good call, Father.

VERRETT
I can't look.

FOUL LINE

Ice shoots smoothly- SWISH! A SMALL CHEER from the St. Augie's contingent-

CLOSER - ICE

He gets the ball back from the ref, turns his head to look at the Lincoln bench-

HIS POV - LINCOLN BENCH

All on their feet, hearts in their throats-

ICE

He smiles wickedly, turns his head and in the same motion fires-

HOOP

SWISH!

BENCH - STANDS

The Purple Knights' bench and fans erupt in a CHEER, rushing out onto the floor to congratulate Ice. Travis gives a sullen look to Verrett as he strolls past. The smile fades from Verrett's face-

INT. BUS - NIGHT

We TRACK from the rear, where the players are making up new verses of Iko Iko, to the front where Verrett drives and Heatwave rides by him-

HEATWAVE
That big sucker they had at center- man. Dude was like a brick wall.

VERRETT
We gave him too many easy shots.

Heatwave looks at his watch-

HEATWAVE
Coach- I mean Father- I think Buster's is gonna be closed up before we get there.

VERRETT
I'll stop at this place up ahead.

HEATWAVE (sees)
Father-

EXT. DINER PARKING LOT - NIGHT

The bus pulls into the lot of a late-night diner, FLASHING NEON proclaiming it is MALONE'S. The bus door cranks open, Verrett steps out, calls back in-

VERRETT
Pit-stop fellas! All orders under five dollars!

We TRACK BACK ahead of him as he walks across the lot toward the diner. He slows, hearing, then turns. None of the boys have followed him, hanging uneasily around the side of the bus. We FOLLOW him back to them-

VERRETT
What's up?

DAP
We can't eat in here, Father.

VERRETT
Why not?

DAP (embarrassed)
You know. We just can't.

Verrett frowns, turns back around to look at the diner-

VERRETT
You ever try?

DAP
No-

VERRETT
Then how do you know you can't?

TRAVIS (sarcastic)
Never tried to fly, either.

Verrett looks back and sees the fear and shame on their faces, the insolent challenge from Travis-

TRAVIS
You just another nigger to them. Father.

The others are shocked by the boldness of this. Verrett holds Travis' eyes for a long moment, then turns to walk to the diner-

VERRETT
I have to use the men's room-

ANTOINE
Can't do that, neither, Father V.

VERRETT (calls back)
We'll see.

We HOLD on the boys, looking young and scared in their wrinkled jackets and ties-

SNOW
The brother in a hurry to get to Heaven.

INT. DINER - NIGHT

A WAITRESS in the all-white diner looks up from a basket of po-boy and fries as she turns from the cook's window. We see Verrett pass, REFLECTED in the shiny metal behind her-

WAITRESS
Oh Lord-

She drops the order and heads for the back-

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Verrett slaps cold water on his face at the sink, shuts the tap off, stares at himself in the mirror. He takes a deep breath, starts out-

INT. DINER

Verrett steps out of the bathroom and passes through a gauntlet of disapproving stares from the CUSTOMERS at the counter. Walking self-consciously, he stops when he sees that the team has come in, all crowded into a pair of booths in the corner. He sets his face, moves to slide in next to Travis-

VERRETT
Thought you fellas weren't hungry.

TRAVIS (ironic)
None of us are old enough to drive the bus, Father.

Verrett gives him a small smile, picks up a menu. The waitress appears beside them, nearly shaking with fear and resentment-

WAITRESS
Excuse me-

VERRETT
Hi. You have any specials tonight?

WAITRESS
I'm afraid I can't serve yall.

VERRETT (ingenuous)
Oh really? Why not?

WAITRESS
I just can't.

VERRETT
Can't or won't?

Malone Sr. comes out of the back to assess the situation-

WAITRESS
Mr. Malone? They won't go.

Malone comes over to tower menacingly by the table-

MALONE SR.
What do you want, Bud?

VERRETT (polite)
Coconut cream pie and a cup of coffee. Black. The others might need a minute to decide.

MALONE SR. (leans close)
Buddy, what you want and what's gonna happen is two different things.

VERRETT
I understand that there are laws-

MALONE SR.
You can either clear out now or you gonna be in a world of trouble. That outfit you wearin only goes so far with me.

Several of the tougher-looking MEN in the diner are standing around the table now-

WAITRESS

Scared, she sidles over to the telephone beside the cash register-

TABLE

Verrett has painted himself into a corner. Malone towers over him, getting angrier by the second-

VERRETT
Maybe you boys had better leave.

Dap makes a move to stand but Travis holds him down, eyes locked on Verrett's, daring him-

TRAVIS
We're a team, Father. Can't have one man out grandstandin on his own, can we? *

Travis holds Father Verrett's eye for a long moment. Malone grabs Verrett by the arm and yanks him out of his chair, swinging him hard against a wall!

MALONE SR.
Goddammit, what you gotta make it hard for? Stirrin things up-

TRAVIS

Travis moves as if to help but then sees the butt of a pistol sticking out from the belt of the man standing next to him. He freezes in his seat-

WAITRESS (O.S.)
Mr. Malone? Mr. Malone?

WIDER

The waitress approaches gingerly as Malone holds Verrett pinned against the wall-

WAITRESS
Police said they be here in a minute.

MALONE SR.
What you call them for?

WAITRESS
I thought you wanted me to.

We TIGHTEN on Malone and Verrett. Malone sneers at the priest-

MALONE SR.
God must be lookin after you, boy.

We hear DISTANT SIRENS-

INT. JAILHOUSE CORRIDOR - NIGHT

We HANDHOLD, backing up behind Verrett as he is pushed roughly down a hallway by a pair of white city COPS. Black ARMS reach out from the cells lining the corridor, black MEN'S VOICES CALL OUT-

INT. BOOKING AREA - NIGHT

A group of PARENTS stand together listening to Father Grant apologize in whispers. Their sons silently sort through the pile of gym bags in the middle of the floor. COPS look on sardonically-

TRAVIS

Travis watches, embarrassed, as his father talks with a POLICE OFFICER-

HIS POV - HOWARD AND OFFICER

HOWARD
He isn't like that. But there's all this business on the news-

OFFICER
We hadn't got there it's no tellin what those old boys might've done-

HOWARD
I understand that, Officer, I appreciate how you've handled it-

OFFICER
You realize we got your boy's name on our records now-

HOWARD
You won't see him here again, I promise you that-

TRAVIS - BOOKING AREA

Travis looks away just as Verrett is led out and taken to face the DESK SERGEANT. The man dumps belongings from a manilla envelpe onto the desk-

DESK SERGEANT
Anything missing?

Father Grant steps in to take the keys to the bus-

GRANT
I'll take these.

He won't even look at Father Verrett. Verrett looks to the parents-

PARENTS

Howard steps forward to take Travis by the arm, his eyes drilling into the priest-

HOWARD (to Verrett)
Ought to leave you in here.

The parents pull their boys away. Verrett wearily signs for his things, starts to follow-

DESK SERGEANT (calls after)
Hey!

Verrett turns back to see the sergeant dangling his crucifix, grinning-

DESK SERGEANT
Don't forget this- Father. *

EXT. SCHOOL - NIGHT

The school bus pulls up, stops. The ENGINE cuts OFF, the LIGHTS go OUT-

INT. BUS - NIGHT

Grant in the driver's seat, Verrett across from him. A silence, one that started back at the police station. Grant begins quietly-

VERRETT
We were absolutely within the law-

GRANT (angry)
The law? They burned thirty churches to the ground last year, did the law stop that? They pulled those three boys out of the ground in Mississippi-

VERRETT
This was a public place-

GRANT
They're killing people in public places, you can watch it on the news! You put those boys in mortal danger-

VERRETT
No more than they're in every day of their lives! I admit I should have checked the situation out fir-

Grant yanks the lever and the bus door RATTLES open. He looks away from Verrett, done arguing-

GRANT
Explain it to the Archbishop! He wants us in his office, eight o'clock sharp. *

Verrett nods, walks stiffly out of the bus. We HOLD on Father Grant, face red, gripping the steering wheel too hard-

INT. PORTER APARTMENT - NIGHT

An argument in progress-

TRAVIS
He didn't do it! We all did it!

HOWARD
He is the adult in charge, the one responsible-

TRAVIS
What did we do wrong? Tell me one thing!

HOWARD
I'm not talkin wrong I'm talkin stupid! You know how that man is gonna feel, you walk in his place! Them police, they don't care how many points you score, you just another nigger to them-

TRAVIS
That's what you want me to be? Just another nigger?

Howard's eyes flash with anger-

HOWARD
You playin with me, boy?

TRAVIS
I'm trying to talk to you. If you want to put up with their bullshit, that's fine-

THELMA
Watch your mouth, young man!

TRAVIS
-but you're not gonna catch me bowin and scrapin just to get over!

HOWARD
You don't know a damn thing about it. That man has got you so turned around-

TRAVIS
Least he's got the courage to-

Thelma steps in between them just in time to avoid Travis getting smacked-

THELMA
Travis Porter you get up to your room! I don't want to hear another word outa your mouth!

Travis glares at his father and stomps away. We HOLD on his parents. Thelma looks at Howard, worried-

HOWARD
Boy's got no idea what's out there!

THELMA
We never wanted him to, baby. We never wanted him to.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - NIGHT

Travis is still steaming. He gives the wall a vicious SLAM with his hand-

MOMMIT (O.S.)
Don't be punishin my wall, boy. Get in here.

We FOLLOW Travis into Mommit's room. She is sitting up in bed. He leans against her doorway, crossing his arms, sulking-

TRAVIS
You hear all that?

MOMMIT
I'm blind, boy, not deaf. You don't wanna be hollerin at your daddy like that.

TRAVIS
He wants me to kiss up to those-

MOMMIT
He doesn't want nothin but you grow up straight and not get kilt! Your daddy had enough of trouble in his life.

TRAVIS
We didn't do anything wrong.

MOMMIT
Yeah, but you got to learn to pick your shots, darlin. Got to make em count.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

INT. ARCHBISHOP'S OFFICE - DAY - ECU RING

A white hand, bearing a large, ornate ring, fills the screen. Verrett's lips enter for a deferential kiss-

VERRETT
Your Excellency.

ROOM

ARCHBISHOP DAMIEN, an elegant-looking Irishman in his mid-60's, points to chairs in the lavishly-appointed room-

ARCHBISHOP DAMIEN
Please have a seat.

Fathers Grant and Verrett sit. The Archbishop remains standing. He picks up a couple newspaper articles from a table, puts on a pair of glasses that hang from his neck-

ARCHBISHOP DAMIEN (reads)
'Negro high school files action to end segregation..'
(another clipping)
'St. Augustine sues for right to compete... Diocesan leaders taken by surprise...'

GRANT
Our Fathers' Club filed the-

ARCHBISHOP DAMIEN
Do you think I'm an idiot, Bob?

GRANT
No, your Excellency. I-

ARCHBISHOP DAMIEN
You tried to do an end-run around me, but it didn't work. Then you send this one-

VERRETT
Father Grant didn't send me to do anything.

ARCHBISHOP DAMIEN
You thought that up all by yourself, did you? Or did your political friends up north make a call?

VERRETT
Nobody-

ARCHBISHOP DAMIEN
They sent you to agitate, didn't they? To stir things up in my front yard-

VERRETT
It was a spur-of-the-moment decision-

ARCHBISHOP DAMIEN
You Josephites are something. What's your friend's name up there- Berrigan? Pouring blood on draft files! We won't have that kind of pinko nonsense on my watch, mister. The Bible says a man can not serve two masters- you'd better make up your mind just whose tune you're marching to. I'm sure Reverend King and his crowd would be happy to sign you on.
(to Grant)
And no more lawsuits, understood?

GRANT
Understood.

ARCHBISHOP DAMIEN
If I read anything more in the paper about your outfit it had better be a bingo tournament. *

INT. BARBERSHOP - DAY - FLOOR

We TRACK across shattered GLASS littering the shop floor, a BRICK in the midst of it, then TILT up to see Howard and Mr. Blanchard looking down at it, the smashed picture window behind them-

HOWARD (quietly)
I'll get the broom.

INT. CHURCH - DAY - CONGREGATION

Catholic Mass is being celebrated. We PAN across the congregation, all black men and women, till we come to Father Grant, watching, troubled-

ALTAR, VERRETT

Verrett, in his Mass vestments, moves gracefully across the altar, speaking in fluent Latin. He seems at peace, totally hooked into the Sacrament-

GRANT

Chanting and touching his chest three times with the other worshipers-

GRANT
Mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa-

INT. CHURCH - LATER

The pews empty now. We PAN till we see Grant and Verrett sitting in the far back corner by the Confessional booths, Verrett still in his Mass vestments-

CLOSER

They are silent for a long moment before Grant speaks- *

GRANT
Our primarily concern has to be the soul. The everlasting soul.

VERRETT
Why do we have missions? Why do we have schools, hospitals? If the Church condones hypocrisy, if it condones racism- *

GRANT
We do not condone it-

VERRETT
We accept it, we promote it-

GRANT
No! We acknowlege that it exists, we do what we can to fight it.

VERRETT
What? Say prayers and hope the rednecks will see the light?

GRANT
Look at the school- the graduation rate, college acceptances-

VERRETT
Graduating to what? We tell those boys they can do anything if they apply themselves- that's a lie! It may not seem like it here, Father, but the world is changing. Get educated, get religion, be a credit to your race- that just won't cut it anymore!

Grant is hurt, angry-

GRANT
So join the protestors! But don't use the Church as a shield, and don't use my boys as-

VERRETT
Your boys?

GRANT
I built that school. I put my life into it. I won't see it destroyed!

VERRETT
The time for turning the other cheek has passed, Father. There's a new gospel circulating- "If you can't sit at the table, knock the legs off"!

GRANT
Nothing that encourages strife can-

VERRETT
What are you afraid of? The Archbishop? Or are you afraid that if we real change things you won't be able to play the Great White Father anymore?

GRANT
That is totally uncalled for!

They are suddenly aware of their raised voices ECHOING in the empty church. They look away from each other-

GRANT (quietly)
So why are you a priest?

Verrett takes a long time to answer- *

VERRETT
You really want to know?

GRANT
Yes.

VERRETT
Sometimes- serving Mass, working with people, just thinking, whatever- sometimes I feel God. With me. In me.

Grant looks at him, envious-

VERRETT
It didn't happen in the heat of a prayer meeting, like with the Baptists, or in a flash of Heavenly light or anything. He crept into me, slow, like the sun warming you early in the morning. I just knew He wanted me to look at what was wrong and do whatever I could to make it right. And now and then there's a reminder- last night, when I saw those boys sitting in that diner- I felt God then.

He is a bit embarrassed. These are very private feelings-

GRANT
I think that may be something different. There's a degree of arrogance in thinking that all our actions have the Lord's approval-

VERRETT (blunt)
The Archbishop said you can't serve two masters. If you're telling me I can't serve God and the Church at the same time- I'll choose God.

Verrett stands and walks away. We HOLD on Grant, thinking-

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Verrett sits looking at his class, depressed, in a darkly philosophical mood-

VERRETT
I'm sure you've all heard about our- our confrontation the other night. I did something very wrong. I brought other people into a personal situation without thinking about the consequences.

TRAVIS
It wasn't wrong-

Verrett thinks-

VERRETT
When you graduate from this school you should be prepared to make decisions- whether it's stepping into a stolen car or joining a civil rights march- not because somebody dares you to, but because you've thought about the consequences and know what's right. To those of you at the diner, I apologize.

TRAVIS

Troubled to hear what he thinks is a retreat-

VERRETT (O.S.)
Mr. Toussaint, I believe you have a report for us-

INT. JESUIT GYM - NIGHT

Polished hardwood, high ceilings, fold-out bleachers and the first glass backboards we've seen- a palace compared to the gyms of the black schools. The game is in progress, FANS cheering, as we TRACK through the running players, past fans standing in between the stands to see Travis, Snow and Dap walk in from the outside. They are nervous, hanging close to each other, the only blacks in the whole building-

DAP
Snow, man, you keep that motormouth shut.

SNOW
I aint sayin nothin.

Travis looks into the rafters-

TRAVIS
Look at this place-

DAP
Let's find somewheres they can't see us.

SNOW
Be cool, brother, it's just a ball game. It's getting home got me worried-

INT. BARBER SHOP - NIGHT

A score of men from the FATHERS' CLUB are ranged standing and in chairs on all sides of the room, angry and suspicious. The front window is covered in cardboard, the glass broken jaggedly. Father Grant watches from by the door, arms folded, still nursing his grudge. Verrett stands in the middle of the room, taking heat-

BLANCHARD
Come in this morning I got by front window bust, on the floor is a brick with Travis Porter's name on it!

VERRETT
How did they connect-

PINKY
From the po-lice, where you think you are? They took down all kinds of addresses last night-

VERRETT
Look, I take full responsibility for the incident at the restaurant. A situation arose and I felt a stand had to be taken-

HOWARD
You put those boys' lives on the line.

VERRETT
I agree that it was badly planned-

BLANCHARD
You got no idea what you dealin with here! Come down from Baltimore with your ideas-

VERRETT (snaps)
I know damn well where I am! I grew up right crost the river in Algiers!

The men are surprised to hear this-

VERRETT
1939. I'm fourteen years old. I get in a fight with a white boy cause he calls me outa my name. I win the fight. Feel pretty good about myself till I get back to the orphanage and there's some cracker with a badge. The sisters put me on the night train. North.

A brief silence-

PINKY
So you out for revenge.

Verrett sighs, looks around the room-

VERRETT
I don't suppose anything like that ever happened to any of you men?

MEN

We PAN around at their faces. Solemn, angry, ashamed. Each has their own memory-

FATHER GRANT

Looking around at the men-

ROOM, VERRETT

VERRETT
I don't suppose any of you ever had to swallow your pride, turn tail and run, give up a dream because of the so-called 'way things work' down here, have you?

HOWARD (troubled)
So?

VERRETT
I'll bet you, every one of you, fought back whatever way you knew how. Pushed against it and pushed against it till you hit a wall, a wall that just wouldn't budge.

He turns, looking each man in the eye-

VERRETT
You're all good fathers, that's why you're here. You want to protect your children, keep them from danger, from disappointment. But don't you be the wall that keeps them back.

HOWARD

Frowning, resisting but hearing the words-

VERRETT (O.S.)
You think your sons aren't good enough to eat in Malone's diner?

VERRETT

VERRETT
Do you think they aren't good enough to walk on a basketball court with a white team?

ALPHONSE
It's not that simple, Father.

VERRETT
We are all equal under the eyes of God.

We see Father Grant behind him, troubled-

VERRETT
It is absolutely that simple.

INT. JESUIT GYM - NIGHT - CU DAP

The game in progress. Dap is too nervous to pay much attention. He looks into the stands behind-

DAP'S POV - FANS

A trio of white MEN stare down at him, not happy about the 'intrusion'-

DAP, SNOW, TRAVIS

Dap sweating it out as the other two watch the game-

DAP
They're looking at us again.

TRAVIS
Pay attention, Dap. Watch the game.

COURT

The Jesuit team, in beautiful satiny uniforms and Converse All-Star sneakers, works as a precise machine. They spread the zone with passes, rotating quickly without the ball. Their opponents scurry back and forth as if trying to stomp out a brush fire-

TRAVIS (O.S.)
Look at that ball move! These guys are slick.

There's an opening- SNAP! A pass rockets in to Mike Malone, who fakes his man into the air, takes one dribble and SLAM! JAMS the ball home-

STANDS - KNIGHTS

The boys look at each other-

TRAVIS
The man can play.

SNOW
We'd bust em, though. Turkeys are earthbound.

TRAVIS
They box you out right that don't matter. Look at this-

COURT

The Jesuits are all over the ball on defense, their opponents making risky passes on the perimeter, a guard finally throwing up a prayer. Four Jesuits are there for the rebound-

STANDS, COURT

We shoot over the Knights' shoulders toward the floor-

SNOW
Anybody look good against the chumps they playing-

Chick Viola passes by with a Coke in his hand-

CHICK
Another little field trip, fellas?

He winks sarcastically and moves on. Jerry the point guard steals a pass and takes off down the floor. A defender catches up at the hoop but the Jerry bounce-passes behind his back to Mike for another JAM!

SNOW
I seen enough of this shit.

EXT. BARBERSHOP - NIGHT

Verrett and Grant come out of the meeting-

GRANT
Very impressive, Father. You'd make a good politician.

VERRETT
I don't deserve that.

GRANT (cool)
I meant it as a compliment. I hope you're just as persuasive when you have to face those boys and tell them the exhibition game isn't happening-

Verrett stops to face Father Grant-

VERRETT
Ask yourself something, Father. Are you afraid the game won't happen, or that it will?

He steps away, leaving Grant looking like he's been punched-

EXT. BUS STOP - NIGHT

The boys stand on a deserted corner, trying not to look worried-

TRAVIS
Rebounder?

SNOW
Bill Bridges.

TRAVIS
Point guard?

SNOW
Oscar.

TRAVIS
So you got Oscar, Sam Jones, Bill Bridges, Elgin Baylor and Wilt-

DAP
Maybe they stop running this time of night.

TRAVIS (checks watch)
No they don't.

DAP
I'monna call my parents. We sittin ducks out here-

TRAVIS
You won't be sittin for a month if your father finds out we been over here.

SNOW (sees)
Check it out, man-

STREET

A CAR cruises by them like a shark, rolls a ways past, then stops, idling for a moment-

DAP (O.S.)
Aw no-

The car pulls away slowly, turns the corner-

BOYS

Truly shaken now-

TRAVIS
Just be cool. We got a right to be here.

SNOW
Damn. Look-

They turn and we PAN to see the same car, circling back around the corner. It stops, two white MEN step out of the back, one carrying a tire iron-

BOYS

Starting to move-

TRAVIS
We're outa here.

The men break into a run and the boys turn on their scat gear, sprinting across the street as the men and the car pursue-

SIDE STREET

The boys tear around the corner, running toward us, followed by the men and the car. The car guns ahead, swerving in front of Travis to head him to the left as the others go right-

EXT. STREET - NIGHT - TRAVIS

Running down a narrow side street as the car cruises behind him, playing.

A bottle arcs through the streetlights after him, SMASHING on the sidewalk at his feet as we hear a loud REBEL YELL from the car. Travis hops over a low wall into a yard-

BACK YARD - TRAVIS

He hops down and lurches across the dark yard, banging into a barbecue grill, getting tangled in a clothesline-

DRIVER (O.S.)
Come on outa there, boy!

RRROWWWWWR! A GUARD DOG suddenly lunges at Travis from the dark, jaws SNAPPING inches from his leg as the dog is pulled short on a chain. We HANDHOLD to run with Travis, hopping fences, ducking under stairs, busting through a wooden gate into an alley, running-

CU TRAVIS

Panicked, running-

CU LEGS

His legs churning-

TRAVIS

He wheels around a corner- WHUMP! running straight into the huge, backlit figure of a MAN-

SIDEWALK

THWAP! Travis hits the sidewalk face first. A foot stomps down on the back of his neck, pinning him-

ED
Get his arms! Hold im!

LES
I got im! He aint goin nowhere!

CHONK! The tire iron smashes the pavement inches from Travis's face. A SHADOW comes over him as ED squats down. We only hear his voice as he hisses into the boy's ear-

ED
What you doing over here, boy? You one of them smart-alecks come down to cause trouble?

TRAVIS
Naw- I'm from here-

ED
So you're just the common garden-variety nigger-

The other man LAUGHS-

ED
-out to steal somethin in the white folk's neighborhood.

TRAVIS
We went to a game! That's all we did!

CHONK! The tire iron comes down again-

ED
You watch your tone with me, Sonny, or you'll wish you was never born! What you think we oughta do with him?

LES
I say we shove that jack-handle down his lyin throat-

ED
Point is, Sonny, you not welcome over here. Understand?

Travis says nothing. The sharp edge of the tire iron is pushed against his cheek-

ED
Understand?

TRAVIS
Yes.

ED
Yes what?

TRAVIS (whispers)
Yes sir.

ED
At's more like it.

The tire iron is pulled away. The SHADOW lifts and the foot is taken from the back of his neck-

ED
We catch your black ass this side of Poydras again, it'll be the last time.

We hear them **WALK AWAY.** Travis rolls over, sits up slowly. He looks around. Suddenly there is a SQUEAL of BRAKES and a car heads straight at him! Travis can only throw his arms over his face before the car SCREECHES to a halt right in front of him, HEADLIGHTS glaring into his eyes. A CAR DOOR OPENS-

DAP (O.S.)
Travis! It's us, man!

Wesley the cab driver steps out next to Travis, reaches his hand down-

WESLEY
Let's get you outa here, son.

INT. PORTER KITCHEN - NIGHT

Howard is assembling a plate of leftovers from the refrigerator. Travis steps in, still shaken. Things remain strained between them-

TRAVIS
Hey.

HOWARD
Out with the guys?

TRAVIS (shakily)
Yeah.

Howard notices dirt scuffs on his son's pants and shirt-

TRAVIS
We were at the park- got in a one-on-one and the man dumped me under the hoop.

Howard just frowns at him-

HOWARD
I'm supposed to believe that?

TRAVIS (quietly)
I was in a fight.

HOWARD
With who?

TRAVIS
Some peckerwoods.

HOWARD
What they doing over here?

TRAVIS
(lowers his eyes)
They weren't over here.

Howard looks at his son carefully. Travis is still shaking-

HOWARD
You okay?

Travis considers telling, then shrugs-

TRAVIS
I'm fine.

HOWARD (thoughtful)
You got to carry who you are inside you, son. No matter what anybody say, no matter what they do to you, they can't touch that. Is there anything more you want to tell me?

TRAVIS
No.

HOWARD (nods)
Club had a meeting tonight. They voted to let your Father Verrett coach out the end of the season.

TRAVIS
Yeah?

HOWARD
I was against it.

Travis takes a long look at his father-

TRAVIS
Night, Poppa.

HOWARD
Good night.

Howard watches Travis exit, troubled-

INT. JESUIT GYM - DAY - MIKE

The Jesuit team scrimmaging. Mike is dripping sweat, pushing the other players-

MIKE JR.
C'mon! Tighten up! Let's go!

SIDELINES

Father McManus watches from an empty bleacher. LYDELL, the school custodian, stands next to him-

FATHER MCMANUS (proud)
You ever see a bunch play like this, Lydell?

LYDELL
Not too many can.

Father Grant appears to sit by him-

GRANT
Your Malone boy is a real leader.

FATHER MCMANUS
Bob- to what do we owe the honor?

Lydell makes himself scarce-

GRANT
You know what.

FATHER MCMANUS
I thought the Archbishop told your rabble-rouser there to cool it.

GRANT
I promised the boys I'd ask. *

FATHER MCMANUS (sighs)
The parents said no.

GRANT
That's an easy out.

FATHER MCMANUS (firm)
You listen to your people, Father. I have to listen to mine. We live in * an imperfect world. Whoah! Did you * see that shot? *

EXT. SCHOOL - PLAYGROUND - DAY

Father Verrett runs the team through a drill-

VERRETT
Pass the ball and move, pass and move, don't ever stand still! That's it! Keep your hands up and ready for the ball! Antoine's open!

The ball is kicked out to Antoine, who sinks a jumper. TWEEEE! Verrett steps out among them-

VERRETT
Excellent ball movement. But Joseph, the minute Antoine leaves his feet you've got to shift back on defense.

ANTOINE
But I don't miss, Father V.

VERRETT
Would you like to give me a lap around the fence for every one you do miss?

ANTOINE
Well- sometimes maybe-

Verrett sees Father Grant heading out to talk with them, continues instructing-

VERRETT
Touche, you're just watching the ball. Get some position for a rebound, get your hip into the other man. Father?

Grant has a long face. The boys crowd around-

VERRETT
News?

GRANT
The Jesuit parents wouldn't go for it. The game's off. Sorry.

Travis, his face deadpan, steps off the court past the priests-

GRANT
Travis-

VERRETT
Travis, practice isn't over!

Travis just keeps walking-

GRANT
Where's he going?

EXT. PLAYGROUND - DAY

Travis, in his street clothes now, sullenly leans against the fence, barely watching the outdoor games. We WIDEN to see * that he's hanging with Little Ricky with Clanky and FAT * FELIX, a tough-looking man in his mid-20's. Clanky lugs a quart bottle of beer-

LITTLE RICKY
(to Felix)
Yall ever see my nigger work that pill? My boy can throw down.

FELIX
Hear he's better than you was.

LITTLE RICKY
Well I schooled him, didn't I? Looka here, Travis-

He pulls Felix out to pretend to guard him-

LITTLE RICKY
You got some big piece of work leaning on you- lean on me, that's right- you use your chicken wing, hook by the man-

He back-bumps into Felix's chest, then hooks him with an elbow and pivots to mime an underhand lay-up-

LITTLE RICKY
Slick, right? Or else you work the deal, see, fake the big man up, then you see your boy open neath the net and you deal, right?

He fakes up and mimes a shovel pass under Felix's arm-

LITTLE RICKY
You got that?

TRAVIS (disinterested)
Yeah, right.
(points to beer)
Let me hold a piece of that, Clank.

Little Ricky frowns, watching as Clanky passes Travis the bottle. Travis turns bottoms up for a long pull, comes up for air-

TRAVIS
Don't none of it mean shit.

He takes another drink-

LITTLE RICKY
You still sposed to be in training, T-

TRAVIS
For what? So I can run around the court for a while longer, then brag on it while I'm cuttin heads or shinin white folks on in the Pullman cars? You got it knocked, Ricky. Aint playin nobody's game--

TRAVIS
What's the story?

LITTLE RICKY
What kind of shit you talkin? What's wrong with you, nigger?

He hurls the bottle over the fence, where it SMASHES on the road-

CLANKY
Fuck, man, you wasted my taste!

Little Ricky pushes Travis hard against the fence-

LITTLE RICKY
You got a future, you understand? You on the move, baby. Don't want to end up out on these bricks with us. Aint got room for another sorry-ass motherfucker on this block!

TRAVIS
They got the whole thing stacked-

LITTLE RICKY
So? All them moves I show you before? That's just icing, man. The first thing you got to do is take it to the motherfuckers. And there aint nobody gonna do that for you. Now get your lanky ass outa here!

Little Ricky gives him a shove toward the gate. Travis glares at him and the others, then grudgingly walks away. Little Ricky rolls his shoulders, huffs-

EXT. STREET - DAY

Travis trudges toward the project. He stops, sees-

CORNER - TRAVIS'S POV

Colette stands on a street corner passing out voter registration flyers with Rod, the guy from SNCC. Colette sees him, gives a shy wave-

TRAVIS

We FOLLOW Travis over to her-

COLETTE
Hey-

TRAVIS
How you been?

ROD (steps over)
You old enough to vote, brother?

TRAVIS
No.

COLETTE
This is a friend of mine, Rod.

ROD
Oh. Cool. Keep the faith-

He steps away to talk to a PASSERBY. Travis is jealous-

TRAVIS
Your parents know you're doing this?

COLETTE
Yeah. They wouldn't let me picket, though. How you been?

TRAVIS
I been better.

COLETTE
Yall gonna play that white team?

TRAVIS
The parents said no.

COLETTE
And they run the world, huh?

Travis takes this as the reproach that it is. He shoots a look to Rod, then back to Colette-

TRAVIS
You be careful out here.

He turns and begins to move back in the direction he came from-

EXT. STREET - DAY

Travis dodges TRAFFIC as he crosses into another section of town, trotting now-

CU TRAVIS

His face determined as he runs-

STREET SIGN

Poydras Street. We TILT DOWN to see Travis looking up at it with a bit of trepidation. He takes a deep breath, pushes on-

BUINESSMEN

White MEN in jackets and ties step out of an office building. They pause to watch, puzzled, as Travis runs by-

COP

A TRAFFIC COP waving cars through an intersection stares suspiciously as Travis trots across the street past him-

CU TRAVIS

His face set, sweat rolling down his cheeks as he runs-

INT. JESUIT LOCKER ROOM - DAY

Sweaty players peel off their practice uniforms. Jerry stands up on a bench entertaining the others with an impression of their coach's thick accent-

JERRY
-just cuz we got this weekend off I don't want you fellers gettin soft on me. 'At means no late nights, no skirt-grabbin, no pullin yer puddin- 'at means you, Duchamps!

The boys LAUGH. The door from the outside is KICKED OPEN. Travis steps in, breathing hard, looks around. All watch, stunned. He continues in to stand over Mike Malone-

TRAVIS
I'm Travis Porter.

MIKE JR. (evenly)
I know who you are.

JERRY
What you doin here?

TRAVIS
I want you to play us. Unless yall are afraid.

MIKE JR.
Any time, buddy.

TRAVIS
Saturday, two o'clock. Rosenwald courts.

JUKEBOX
We'll be there.

TRAVIS
If you're not, we'll know why.

Travis turns and walks out to the street. The door swings closed behind him-

PLAYER
You crazy? That's on their turf!

MIKE JR.
Every damn time I turn around somebody's whispering about those colored boys and their team! We got to show em, once and for all.

COACH SKINNER (O.S.)
Show who?

COACH

The Jesuit coach, SKINNER, has stepped into the locker room. He looks around at his boys-

COACH SKINNER
What's cookin here, fellers?

INT. GRANT'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Father Grant on the phone, concerned-

GRANT
I understand, Charlie--- No, we can't let that happen--- Of course not-- I think a parents' meeting of both schools would help-- not just the athletic boosters, everybody-- Right, I'll take care of it-- I'll get back to you-

He hangs up, sighs, presses the intercom button on his desk-

GRANT
Mrs. Lanois? Could you find Father Verrett for me?

INT. PORTER APARTMENT - NIGHT

Travis sits on the hot seat, facing his whole family plus Father Verrett-

TRAVIS
It isn't a rumble, it's a game-

HOWARD
If those white boys show up, how they sposed to get out of that neighborhood alive? You know what's going on in this town now- there's some angry people livin here.

TRAVIS
Is that our fault?

VERRETT
Nobody is blaming you for what you did. It's just a matter of- of tactics.

TRAVIS
So you're backing down too?
(indicates Howard)
Just like him?

THELMA
That's it! Up to your room!

TRAVIS
I-

THELMA
Now.

Travis scowls, hauls to his feet and slumps off to his room-

THELMA
Sorry, Father.

VERRETT
Some of it's probably my fault-

HOWARD
I won't argue with that.

VERRETT
There's going to be a parents' meeting- trying to head off a fight. If we can rally public opinion around this issue-

HOWARD
Our public opinion or their public opinion?

THELMA
Howard-

HOWARD
Their sports man won't even run my boy's scores in his paper! He's your public opinion!

MOMMIT
Shame to see a man treat his own like dirt.

They look to Mommit, who has been listening silently from a corner-

VERRETT
Who was that?

MOMMIT
What I say now?

THELMA
Who treats his own people like dirt, Mama?

MOMMIT
That Chick Viola. Man is passing.

VERRETT
Chick Viola?

MOMMIT
Everybody knows that. My cousin Clare Borders, over New Iberia, is his- lemme see now- his great aunt. Their side got the good hair.

She sighs, shakes her head-

MOMMIT
Awful thing to see a man shamed of his own self.

INT. TRAVIS'S ROOM - NIGHT

Travis lies on his bed in his clothes, listening to a Celtics/Hawks game on his transistor radio. There is a KNOCK-

THELMA
Travis?

TRAVIS
Yeah.

Travis turns the game down as Thelma steps in. She sits on the edge of his bed-

THELMA
I'm mad at you.

TRAVIS
I know-

THELMA
The way you treating your father-

TRAVIS
I'm not treating hi-

THELMA
I got eyes, Travis! I know you, know what you're thinking. You've got to show some respect-

TRAVIS
Respect for what?

Thelma flashes a hard look at him-

THELMA
If you were standing up I'd knock you down!

Travis looks away, chastened-

THELMA
I worry every time you step out the door. So does your father. We know what's out there.

TRAVIS
He's afraid of everything!

THELMA
That man been through hell in his life, and you won't ever hear him say a sorry word for himself.

A silence, filled by the tinny voice of the RADIO ANNOUNCER. Travis turns the radio OFF-

THELMA
All the man has ever tried to do is keep you safe from the meanness in this world, as best he knows how.

Thelma stands to go-

THELMA
So you have some respect, hear?

INT. NEWSPAPER OFFICE - NIGHT

Chick Viola is typing a story, alone in the darkened newsroom. He looks up to see Verrett standing over him-

CHICK
Jesus! What you spookin around here for?

Verrett sits on a chair next to him-

VERRETT
There's a parents' meeting at Jesuit, another at St. Augustine-

CHICK
I heard about that. Trying to head the young bucks off at the pass. So?

VERRETT
I think this game is an awfully good idea.

CHICK (shakes his head)
When colored and white get that close it generally leads to a fight.

VERRETT
And which side do you take?

CHICK
I side with my people. That's human nature.

VERRETT
I see. Like when you were growing up in New Iberia and the white kids would come-

CHICK (snaps)
What're you getting at?

VERRETT
You're a good writer. I hear next year they're moving you up to the college beat. That's very liberal of them.

Chick looks stricken-

VERRETT (mock surprise)
You mean they didn't know? Well, it couldn't make any difference, words are just words, right, it doesn't matter what color the writer is. Like basketball is just basketball-

CHICK
You son of a bitch.

VERRETT
'He who denieth Me shall give up his immortal soul- '

CHICK
That's a goddam lie.

VERRETT
Think about what it's like for Travis Porter to settle for second best all his life. Think about what it would be like for you.

CHICK
I worked hard for every-

VERRETT
You don't think our boys work hard? You got born light enough to pass- change that one thing and where are you? Huh?

CHICK
You breath one word of that and I'll-

Verrett grabs Chick's typewriter and hurls it across the room, furious! It crashes off a desk and onto the floor-

VERRETT
And you'll what? The rest of them, the rednecks, the peckerwoods, they're ignorant. They've got an excuse. You know better. Your whole life is a lie.

CHICK (desperate)
I was brought up white. It's not just color, it's-

VERRETT
'You hear about that Chick Viola, used to write sports for the Picayune?' 'Yeah, isn't that something? I always thought he had a touch of the tarbrush.' 'Goes to show you, you can educate em, dress em up, but that black stuff's gonna show through sooner or later.'

Chick has lost all his cockiness-

CHICK
You'd do it, wouldn't you? You'd tell.

VERRETT
I'd try not to enjoy it too much.

CHICK (quietly)
What do you want?

VERRETT
When do they put this paper to bed?

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD STREET - NIGHT

Father Grant is out walking, thinking. He slows as he hears a NOISE ahead, somebody moving in the darkness-

GRANT
Somebody there?

A SNIFF, then Little Ricky steps closer, high as a kite, not looking like he'll last the year. He speaks in a husky, distant voice-

LITTLE RICKY
Hey, Father G, man. What up?

GRANT
Ricky-

LITTLE RICKY
Got to be careful out here, Father. Some desperate niggers walkin about.

GRANT
How've you been?

Little Ricky gives him a dead man's smile-

LITTLE RICKY
You know me, Father. Been walkin with the angels.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

INT. BARBERSHOP - DAY

Jukebox filibusters as he cuts Lydell's hair. Howard sits brooding in a barber chair, staring at himself in the mirror, as Pinky reads the Picayune in the corner-

JUKEBOX
One qu-qu-quarter- that's one outa every four kilt over there is c-c-colored boys-

PINKY (standing)
Damn! Look at this!

JUKEBOX
You keep that paper outa my face!

PINKY
Aint showin it to you! Howard- lookit this-

He lays the paper in Howard's lap-

CU PAPER - HOWARD'S POV

We see the caricature of Viola over his column. The headline, flanked by a photo of Mike Malone on one side and of Travis on the other, reads-

TIME HAS COME FOR DREAM MATCH

Jesuit Has Worthy Foe - Right Across Town

PINKY (O.S., reading)
"-it is high time this city joined the 20th century-"

TWO-SHOT

We shoot up at Pinky reading over Howard's shoulder-

PINKY
Sock it to em! "Could the much-vaunted Jesuits be ducking their stiffest competition?" What'd this boy eat for breakfast?

INT. SPORTS BAR - DAY

We FOLLOW Chick into the bar. He sits at the counter. The MAN at the next stool looks at him, moves. Chick looks across to the elbow of the bar where Malone and Turk sit behind beers, staring at him. He grins, waves. They look away-

INT. ST. AUGUSTINE GYM LOBBY - DAY

Father Grant stands looking at the trophy case. Lots of trophies, photos of past teams. Grant leans close to one-

GRANT'S POV - PHOTO

A grinning schoolboy with a basketball in his hands. "RICHARD 'Little Ricky' MEAUX"- three-time league scoring champion-

VERRETT (O.S.)
You wanted to see me?

GRANT, VERRETT

Grant straightens to look at the younger man-

GRANT
You never saw Ricky play, did you?

VERRETT
No.

GRANT
The word 'grace' comes to mind.

He struggles to find the words-

GRANT
I've been doing a bit of soul-searching- I- all these years I've been counting my sucesses. I got this one out, I got that one out. Escapees. Like helping someone tunnel out of prison.

VERRETT (warily)
There are worse ways to spend your life.

GRANT
We shouldn't be digging tunnels. We should be pushing the walls down.

Verrett grins-

VERRETT
When do we start?

INT. JESUIT AUDITORIUM - NIGHT - DOORWAY

We sit just inside the door to the auditorium, watching as the white PARENTS and STUDENTS face Father Grant and Father McManus, who stand on the stage-

MALONE SR.
My point is, you do not have the right to walk in here and force people to change their way of life.

MALONE SR., MIKE

The son sits slumped in his chair in the first row, listening with the bored exasperation of a teenager, as the father stands angrily adressing the priests-

MALONE SR.
We have a system of whaddayoucallit-parallel education going here for years and years and I think it's worked pretty damn well-

GRANT
Parallel?

STAGE - GRANT

GRANT
I may be unclear on my geometry, but when one line leads up and the other goes nowhere, that's not parallel.

AUDITORIUM

Other people on both sides rising to be heard-

MALONE SR.
I will not compromise on the safety of my family!

GRANT
Safety from what? Safety from equality?

MALONE SR.
Listen here-

Father McManus steps in to head off a yelling match-

FATHER MCMANUS
Safety is the purpose of this meeting! We're trying to find a way to avoid a confrontation on the streets and set up some kind of supervised alternative-

INT. ST. AUGUSTINE CHURCH

Verritt is at the pulpit, sweating, working his sermon like a Baptist preacher-

VERRETT
When Moses came to the children of Israel and told them it was time to go forth unto the Promised Land, did they cover their ears from his voice?

CONGREGATATION (scattered)
No-

VERRETT
Did they cower in the safety of their hovels?

CONGREGATATION
No-

VERRETT
Did they turn away from him and thank God Almighty for the shackles on their ankles and wrists?

CONGREGATATION
No!

VERRETT
No they did not! Moses was a great man, a brave man, a man touched by the power of God, but he was only a beacon, the Light that showed the way! It was the children of Israel who faced that Pharoah down! Like the river too mighty to be held by its banks, they strained to be free, they pushed to be free, they poured over the puny obstacles of earthly kings and broke the bonds of slavery!

MOMMIT (O.S.)
Amen!

PORTER FAMILY

Sitting in a pew. Thelma looks at her mother disapprovingly-

THELMA
Mama-

MOMMIT
Man preachin the Old Testament!

VERRETT (O.S.)
Can we be any less bold?

VERRITT

VERRETT
Can we be timid, can we be faint of heart, and expect to rise to Heaven's glory?

INT. JESUIT AUDITORIUM

The debate still cooking-

WHITE FATHER
I don't see why we have to do anything but lock them in their rooms and throw away the key!

FATHER MCMANUS
We're aware of your concern. I think both sides are just as worried about this.

REAR OF AUDITORIUM - CHICK VIOLA

The sportswriter enters, comes down the aisle a bit-

GRANT (O.S.)
Our proposal is that a non-league game be played this weekend behind closed doors.

GRANT

GRANT
Teams, coaches, referees, nobody else.

The audience begins to BUZZ, reacting pro and con-

CHICK

He looks down an aisle at the debating parents-

TURK - CHICK'S POV

Turk and his WIFE and SON sit on the other aisle. Turk stares at Chick-

CHICK

He guiltily steps into the middle of the aisle, crosses his arms. Just a neutral observer-

STAGE

Father Grant takes a deep breath, plunges in to capitalize on their confusion-

GRANT
Of course I understand your fear completely. Your boys here at Jesuit have a wonderful team, and deserve bragging rights as the best squad in the whole state of Louisiana. If somehow they were to lose to a bunch of colored boys fresh off the playground-

There is a loud BUZZ of reaction to this. Grant turns his back to the parents and winks at Father McManus-

COACH SKINNER (O.S.)
Just hold on here! Father! Father!

COACH SKINNER

Standing, his face red. A few PLAYERS are standing around him-

COACH SKINNER
Can I say somethin?

FATHER MCMANUS (O.S.)
Go ahead, Coach Skinner-

COACH SKINNER
I just want it on the record as to that I never been afraid of playing the colored, aint afraid now, and never will be afraid of it!

CHEERS and WHISTLING from Jesuit STUDENTS in the auditorium-

MALONE SR.
See now, everbody's all excited! You get those people over there in Darktown excited and we got some serious trouble.

STAGE

Father Grant gives the whole audience a once-over-

GRANT
I am ashamed that we have to have this meeting. Our boys just want to play a basketball game.

ROOM

Father Grant laying it on thick-

GRANT
As good Catholics, none of us could have any moral reservations about that, could we?
(more)

GRANT (cont'd)
We're supposed to be the spiritual guides for these children-- the spiritual guides for this community-

FATHER MCMANUS
Father-

GRANT
The Lord will not accept hypocrisy. Is there a seperate gospel that Christ left for colored people? Is there a seperate section in the Kingdom of Heaven for-

MALONE SR.
This isn't Heaven, Father. This is Louisiana.

A MURMUR of agreement from a few people-

FATHER MCMANUS
Can we agree to vote on this? An exhibition game on Saturday, no more than three family members for each boy, no cheerleaders, no booster groups, all very low-key-

MALONE SR.
You're trying to railroad this through-

GRANT
All parents in favor of holding the game, raise your hands-

MALONE FAMILY

Malone Sr., livid, calls out to the white section-

MALONE SR.
You people can fall for this deal if you want, but you do it without us!

He turns to Mike, who is stunned-

MALONE SR.
Let's go-

MIKE JR.
Daddy-

MALONE SR.
Hop to it, Mister!

WHITE FATHER
Come on, Mike, you at least got to vote-

Malone Sr. stalks off down the aisle, bumping hard against Chick as he goes. His wife looks to McManus apologetically, follows with Mike Jr.-

GRANT
I'm sure we're all going to vote our conscience, not our race. All in favor-

INT. ST. AUGUSTINE CHURCH

The gospel has extended into a debate by now. Mr. Blanchard, Howard's boss, stands, upset-

BLANCHARD
It's gonna bring retribution down on all of us! They already bust my window- next they gone burn my whole place down!

VERRETT
The people who do that sort of thing need no provocation, Mr. Blanchard-

BLANCHARD (points to Verrett)
This fella here come down from who knows where and he stirred up all these ideas-

TRAVIS (O.S.)
Where do I come from?

CU TRAVIS

Standing, turning to face the congregation-

TRAVIS
Father Verrett didn't stir nothin up, he just stood up for what we all been wanting to happen for too long! This is just a basketball game, see, it shouldn't mean a thing besides that.

ANOTHER ANGLE

We see Howard watching from his seat in the BG as Travis speaks in the FG-

TRAVIS
All the stuff you older people teaching us at school- about God and the government and how to be- we'd like to believe in it. But it's got to be real, you know? Yall got to live it, not just talk it.

Travis sits. A moment of relative silence-

VERRETT

VERRETT
I know it's a strange thing to be talking about a sporting event in God's house, but I believe this young man has a point. May I have a show of hands- all in favor of a controlled exhibition with Jesuit High School?

PORTER FAMILY

Travis watches as Mommit, Thelma, and then Howard raise their hands. Thelma whispers to Mommit-

MOMMIT
Girl, if I aint a parent nobody is!

VERRETT (O.S.)
All opposed?

Nobody around them raises a hand against-

VERRITT

VERRETT
That's almost unanimous. Whether the parents at Jesuit open their hearts or not, I appreciate your--

He stops, sees-

AISLE

Father Grant has entered from the rear. He comes halfway up the aisle-

VERRETT
Father?

GRANT
I believe we have ourselves a basketball game.

MOMMIT
Praise Jesus!

The congregatation shout their amens-

EXT. PLAYGROUND - DAY - CU TENNIS RACKET

A TENNIS RACKET with a large paper HAND glued onto the strings waves in the air-

VERRETT (O.S.)
Move the ball, move it, move it, move it!

WIDER

We see a two Knights' reserves playing low-post zone defense, each holding up a pair of tennis rackets with hands pasted over the strings, making them the equivalent of seven-footers. The first string whips the ball around, passing and rotating, looking for an opening-

VERRETT
Highwater! Get out there in the middle- I want a 2-2-2!

HIGHWATER, a reserve forward, trots out to make a six-man defense-

VERRETT
Move the ball! Keep your eyes open! Heatwave!

HEATWAVE
Father?

VERRETT
Get out there and chase the ball.

HEATWAVE
But I-

VERRETT
Move it!

Heatwave joins the defense, making it 7 against 5. The first team offense has to make sharper passes and cuts just to keep from losing the ball-

VERRETT
This is what it's going to feel like, gentlemen. We haven't seen a zone as tight as theirs, we haven't had to work. We've got to work together-

INT. JESUIT GYM - DAY

The Jesuits run a rebound drill, three men each at four different baskets, throwing the ball high off the backboard and leaping up to rebound it, over and over and over. Coach Skinner strolls among them-

COACH SKINNER
Those boys can leap, fellas, they can sky! Two hands, you go up with two hands!

EXT. PLAYGROUND - KNIGHTS

The team runs the half-court sprint, the line of twelve taking off from the baseline, running to touch the foul line, back to touch the base line, out to touch the center line, back to touch the baseline, out to touch the opposite foul line and so on. A grueling scramble-

VERRETT
Stay low, stay strong! We got to be able to run with these people! That means you, Touche! No walking back on defense! Move those feet!

INT. JESUIT GYM - DAY

The Jesuits run a double-team drill, Jerry feeding the ball in from the top of the key to Mike, guarded by two big men. He bumps, dribbles, passes back to Jerry who dodges free of his defender, Mike fights to get free, gets a bounce pass, fakes, splits the double-team and tosses the ball in underhand-

COACH SKINNER
Work em, work em, work em- attaboy, Mike! Next!

Another player takes Mike's place. Mike trots to the end of the shooter line, where Skinner joins him-

COACH SKINNER
They gonna be all over you- holdin, pushin, they'll pull your shorts down-

MIKE JR.
I can't play, Coach.

COACH SKINNER
Don't worry. Imonna talk to your Daddy.

MIKE JR.
He aint listenin. You know how he is.

INT. KNIGHTS' DRESSING ROOM - EVENING

The team members are scattered around on the floor and on chairs, wasted, too tired to peel off their clothes-

ANTOINE (musing wearily)
You know what'll be cool? They got showers at Jesuit. And glass backboards.

DAP
I never shot on a glass backboard-

ICE
You can't shoot anyways, Dap. Don't worry bout it.

SNOW
Yeah, Dap, don't be worrying bout them white boys. Father V gon kill us before we get there. Man got his schoolin in the Marines or something.

ANTOINE
At least Malone aint coming.

CU TRAVIS

Not happy about this part of the deal-

ANTOINE (O.S.)
Travis gonna have himself some bench-jockey to play against.

EXT. PROJECTS

Travis sits with Little Ricky on the bottom of a set of stairs. Little Ricky is high, trying to make sense-

LITTLE RICKY
I went up there ignorant, see? I never tuned in to the schoolin the way you do- just thought the pill would take me all the way. Turned down what colored schools would take me and waited for that phone call from up north--- Waited. My rep didn't travel, see, and then I got behind that horse and here I be.

Clanky walks by with Felix-

CLANKY
You stick it to them crackers, Travis. You lose, you better put your siditty ass on the next thing smokin!

Felix LAUGHS and they exit-

LITTLE RICKY
Don't listen to him. Nigger is goin nowhere and he wants company.

He puts his hand on Travis's shoulder, leans in, serious and sad-

LITTLE RICKY
I was the best this city ever seen, the best. You steppin out there for me, Travis, and for all the other brothers never got a shot. You gonna do us proud.

CU TRAVIS

Nothing like a little pressure, huh kid?

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Verrett in front of the map of Africa again-

VERRETT
So there were the Belgians in the Congo, the Portugese in Angola- any others?

ANTOINE
British in Kenya.

BOY
French in Senegal.

TOUCHE
Italians in Ethiopia. The Pope sent troops in there.

VERRETT
The Pope?

The students look between Touche and Verrett. Religion is usually off bounds-

TOUCHE
My aunt says she saw a newsreel where this Pope was doing a blessing on Italian guys going off to kill the Ethiopians.

VERRETT
That was in the forties- Pope Pius the 12th. Blessing somebody is different than sending them, but-

HEATWAVE
How could he do that?

Verrett thinks for a long moment before answering-

VERRETT
Religion- faith- is supposed to be above politics. As you learn more you'll find it's awfully hard to separate them.
(smiles)
Lord knows I wish I could.

The BELL RINGS. As the boys file out, Travis pauses to lay a thick pile of handwritten book report on Verrett's desk- *

TRAVIS *
I finished these. *

VERRETT (looks at reports) *
Fifteen pages? *

TRAVIS (shrugs) *
I didn't count em till I finished. *

EXT. ROSENWALD COURTS - NIGHT

We watch Travis for a while, practicing his short hooks alone on the court under low street light. There is something moody and dance-like to the scene. He stops as he sees someone watching from the shadows-

TRAVIS
Daddy?

Howard steps out onto the court-

HOWARD
Kind of tough to see.

TRAVIS
Mostly you just sense where it is.

Howard starts to rebound as Travis shoots 15-footers-

HOWARD
Game wasn't much in my day. They'd just pulled the bottom outa the peach basket. I played baseball.

TRAVIS
Morgan City Pirates.

HOWARD
Yeah.

TRAVIS
You ever play white teams?

HOWARD
No. We didn't want to shine it up- you know- clown around and all. Them days they wanted you smilin or they wanted you gone.

Howard holds the ball, searches for the right words-

HOWARD
Listen- tomorrow, win or lose-- I'm real proud of what you've done. Standin up.

That's all he needs to say. He tosses Travis the ball-

HOWARD
Come on. Your mama's waitin dinner.

WIDE SHOT

The two head home together under the street lights, Travis dribbling the ball-

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

INT. PORTER APARTMENT - DAY - MOMMIT

Mommit sits by the door in her coat, ready to roll. She calls to the next room-

MOMMIT
I'm ready, y'all!

THELMA (O.S.)
We know, Mama-

MOMMIT
We gone be late!

HOWARD (O.S.)
We got plenty of time.

MOMMIT (mutters)
Gone make me miss my dap. People wait till the last crow farts-

EXT. JESUIT HIGH - DAY

The St. Augustine bus pulls up-

CLOSER - BUS

The players step out. Each face darkens as they look toward the school. Verrett steps out, sees, frowns. We PAN to see a few PARENTS and FACULTY milling around, Coach Skinner and his team still in their street clothes, looking grim. Father Grant and Father McManus are in a heated conference with Archbishop Damien in front of the door to the gym as Lydell, the janitor, looks on-

TEAM

Not sure what's up but not liking the looks of it-

DAP
I don't see Malone.

ANTOINE
Forget him, man. Somethin's up-

Verrett steps past them, concerned-

VERRETT
Wait here.

CLERGY

The Archbishop is livid, reading the riot act-

ARCHBISHOP DAMIEN
How stupid do you think I am? You think you can go around me and get away with it?

GRANT
Your Excellency-

ARCHBISHOP DAMIEN
This gymnasium is church property and you are not to set foot on it. Lydell is not going to let you in- are you Lydell?

LYDELL (sheepish)
No sir.

ARCHBISHOP DAMIEN (to Verrett)
You're the one got these people all riled up. You'll be the one to tell them to go home.

He stomps away-

TEAM

Watching Damien walk to his black Lincoln, an AIDE holding the door open for him-

SNOW
That's the Archie, man. That's the heavy artillery-

ANTOINE
What's he want?

TRAVIS
I got a bad feelin.

CLERGY

Verrett is incredulous-

VERRETT
We're going to let him do that?

FATHER MCMANUS
I'm not bucking Phil Damien. Not when he's in that mood.

GRANT
We'll reschedule-

VERRETT
We've got championship games next week. And Damien will be on us tighter than ever.

They watch the Archbishop drive away, despairing. It looks like they've been shut down for good-

VERRETT
All right. I'll tell them.

He takes a discouraged step-

LYDELL
Holiness Baptist got a gym.

They look around at him-

LYDELL (shy)
It's only a couple blocks away.

GRANT
How could we ever get permission to use that?

LYDELL (smiles)
Lydell Johnson, deacon-

He lifts a big knot of keys, waggles them-

LYDELL
-and head custodian.

EXT. STREET - WIDE SHOT

Empty at first, then two groups of people appear, white parents and players walking toward us on the left sidewalk, blacks across the street on the right-

INT. KITCHEN - MALONE HOUSE

The Malones at a very tense breakfast table. Mike hasn't touched his plate. Mrs. Malone and a younger SISTER wait for the explosion-

MIKE JR.
Even Tulane gonna play some teams with colored next year-

MALONE SR.
We'll cross that bridge when we come to it.

MIKE JR.
What difference does it-

MALONE SR. (blows)
Eat your breakfast or go to your room!

Mike gets up sullenly and exits-

YOUNGER SISTER
We gone lose that game without him, Daddy.

Malone has only to look at her. She covers her mouth with her hand. Case closed-

INT. BAPTIST GYM - DAY

Nice, but no palace. Only three rows of old bleachers on each side, PARENTS are settling in-

FLOOR - REFEREES AND COACHES

The two white REFS confer with Verrett and Skinner-

REFEREE
We gone keep a real tight lid on this thing. Let your boys know we won't have any displays- no lip after a call, no temper, no hot-doggin. We ready?

Skinner looks at his watch, then to his boys on the floor-

COACH SKINNER
We have another five minutes? I'm a player short-

FLOOR

Travis takes a warm-up shot. He sees someone in the stands, wanders over-

TRAVIS
Hi.

Colette sits in the second row in her school uniform-

COLETTE
I told em at the door I was your sister.

TRAVIS
Yeah? Thanks for coming.

CHICK

The sportswriter is setting up the machines at the scorer's table. He calls to Verrett as he passes-

CHICK
Congratulations.

VERRETT
Thank you.

CHICK
I gotta tell you, though, you get on the floor with these Jesuits, you might have some second thoughts. Try not to embarrass us out there.

Verrett catches the slip, smiles-

VERRETT
Us?

CHICK (uncomfortable)
Well- you know-

EXT. MALONE BACKYARD - DAY - GROUND

A very large SNEAKER hits the ground in front of us, falling from above. The OTHER SNEAKER hits, bounces. We TILT UP to see Mike, in his street clothes, transferring from the roof to a tree branch. He starts climbing down-

INT. GYM - DAY

The two sides crouch for the center jump. Touche and GREENLY, the Jesuit center, are the same height. Travis is matched against PALMIERI, the replacement for Mike Malone. Dap pairs with DUCHAMPS, Antoine with LYNCH, and Snow hooks up with Jerry at point guard. The ref tosses the ball up, BLOWS his WHISTLE- Touche taps it to Travis who blind-passes to the streaking Snow for an underhanded scoo- WHAP! Duchamps comes out of nowhere, leaping to smack the ball into the stands-

SIDELINES

Heatwave looks to Verrett-

HEATWAVE
I guess some of em can jump.

EXT. JESUIT HIGH - DAY - NOTE

We read a scrawled note taped to the door of the Jesuit gym-

Game has been Relocated to Holiness Baptist Church,

4th and Duquesne

We PULL BACK to see Mike reading it. He turns, jogs away-

INT. GYM - COURT

Jesuit zipping the ball around against the Knights' zone- from Duchamps to Jerry, in to Greenly, back to Jerry, to Lynch, jumpshot- swish!

CHICK

The sportswriter works the controls for an old electronic scoreboard-

SCOREBOARD

Home 8 Visitors 0

SIDELINES

Verrett doesn't quite know what to do-

VERRETT
They're killing us from twenty feet.

HEATWAVE
Our whole team gone stiff-

COURT

The Knights move the ball but are hassled by hand-waving, hustling zone defense. Travis finally puts up an off-balance jumper. It shanks and Greenly rebounds, whirling to throw a baseball pass downcourt to Jerry, breaking on the shot, who lays it in easily-

VERRETT

He signals a 'T' with his hands and Snow asks the ref for time out. The teams trots over, looking stricken-

VERRETT
What is wrong with you people out there?

SNOW
Nothin fallin in for us-

VERRETT
It doesn't 'fall' in, you've got to put it in! Are you afraid of these guys?

TRAVIS
Naw-

VERRETT
Then why are you playing like they're made of porcelain? You scared to bump up against some white skin? Let me tell you something- it doesn't rub off!

He looks at their faces to see if this is sinking in-

VERRETT
All right, now, when we take it out-

STANDS - PORTER FAMILY

Not much cause for celebration on this side of the floor. Howard and Thelma help Mommit to a seat-

MOMMIT
I told you we be late.

THELMA
It's just a ballgame, Mama-

MOMMIT
What we miss?

Howard looks up at the scoreboard-

HOWARD
Nothin good.

COURT

The teams take the floor. BANG! BANG! BANG! We hear POUNDING on the other side of the door just below the basket. BANG! BANG! Somebody KICKING it now. Lydell hurries over, opens it, sticks his head out. He opens the door wide, steps back-

CLOSER, DOOR

A blast of LIGHT from the outside, then, backlit, in steps Mike Malone. A CHEER from the white parents. We PAN as he trots over to his bench, already peeling off his street shirt to reveal his game jersey beneath. Superman has arrived-

KNIGHTS

Dap and the other players are dismayed-

DAP
Just what we need.

Travis is smiling, watching Malone tie his sneakers-

TRAVIS
Naw, man. Now it's real.

COURT

Snow brings the ball up the court, spins a bounce pass in to Touche as he breaks up toward the key. The Jesuit defenders converge, Touche flips the ball back over his head without turning- SLAM! Travis catches the alley-oop and jams it home in one motion!

BLACK PARENTS

On their feet, finally something to CHEER about-

SIDELINE

Coach Skinner shakes his head as his ASSISTANT looks on dumbfounded-

ASSISTANT
Is that legal?

COURT

Travis runs down the court by Mike-

TRAVIS
Glad you could make it, man.

WHAP! Travis runs smack into a pick set by Greenly and Mike zips by him to grab a pass and SLAM an answering dunk through the net! He passes Travis on the way back-

MIKE JR.
Me too.

SCORER'S TABLE

Chick turns to Sister Gonzaga, keeping track of fouls next to him-

CHICK
We got us a contest here!

COURT - BASKETBALL MONTAGE

Various quick shots, the SQUEAKS of sneakers and GRUNTS of players punctuating the action- CU FEET digging in, shifting, picking up to run, jumping out of frame-

CU HANDS dribbling, snatching for the ball-

Jerry and Snow diving, sliding out of bounds towards us after a rolling loose ball-

Duchamps jumper- swish!

Antoine jumper- swish!

Travis hits a short hook-

Malone drives baseline, sinks a reverse lay-up-

Travis hits a turnaround-

Malone hits a turnaround-

Dap leaps high, steals a pass, dribbles the other way-

Jerry driving, pulls up at the key- swish!

Chick hits the scoring button- A black hand presses on a white back-

A white hand presses on a black arm-

The Porter family CHEERS a score-

The white FANS CHEER a score-

Colette CLAPS and CHEERS the Knights on-

Greenly leaps high to block a shot-

Touche fights for a rebound-

Verrett calls a play from the sidelines-

Coach Skinner paces, yelling instructions-

Heatwave kneels, diagramming a play-

CU chalk slate, the x's and o's being scratched down-

Travis drives, collides with Malone. Both fall to reveal the ref, blowing his WHISTLE and indicating a charging foul-

A ball spins high above us as we look up through the net. It plummets through the cords like a howitzer shell!

INT. MALONE HOUSE - DAY

Malone stands outside in the hall, KNOCKING on Mike's door-

MALONE SR.
Mike? I need to talk to you about this. Mike?

He frowns, opens the door, disappears inside. A beat. He steps out, steaming, and heads for the stairs-

MALONE SR.
Damn that boy!

INT. GYM - DAY - COURT

Touche rebounding, tossing to Antoine who takes two dribbles and fires long from just across center court- in and out! The halftime BUZZER sounds-

VERRETT, HEATWAVE

Heading off the floor. Heatwave looks back over his shoulder to the scoreboard in the BG. We RACK to read the story-

INT. LOCKER ROOM

The team sits scattered around, heads down, catching their breath. Verrett just watches them for a long moment before speaking. He starts softly-

VERRETT
Okay. Now we know we belong on the same court as they do. We looked almost presentable out there. But there is no way that team is better than we are! Do you hear me? If everybody- everybody plays up to what he's got inside we will win this game.

He begins to walk among them-

VERRETT
We're going out there full tilt- man-to-man defense, full court press every time we score, fast break off every rebound! Second team, you will play the last two minutes of the third quarter and you will not shoot unless you are fouled and you will run them ragged, understand? Just like we practiced.

He stops by Touche, puts his hand on his shoulder-

VERRETT
First team you are just barely alive out there. I need to see some rhythm, I need to see some style! I'm not calling any more plays- you know all the plays, they're inside you now- let's get down, gentlemen, let's show all these people what this game can be! We fought too hard for this chance not to make the most of it.

He looks around at them, at a loss for anything else to say. Travis speaks up-

TRAVIS
Father V? Can we have a minute just to ourselves?

FLOOR

Verrett steps out onto the floor. Grant is waiting for him, anxious-

GRANT
Where are the boys?

VERRETT
They'll be here.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - CU CARDS

Travis pulls his beloved basketball cards from his gym bag, pulls the rubber band off of them-

WIDER

The starters have ringed around him as the others look on. He solemnly begins to peel cards off the stack and hand them to his teammates. He hands one to Snow-

TRAVIS
Hal Greer-

SNOW
Shake and bake!

TRAVIS
Blinding speed to the hole-

SNOW
Stop and pop!

TRAVIS (to Dap)
Satch Sanders-

DAP
Best defense on the planet!

TRAVIS (to Antoine)
Dick Barnett-

ANTOINE
Nothin but net!

TRAVIS (to Touche)
Wilt-

TOUCHE
The Stilt-

TRAVIS
The Tower of Power-

TOUCHE
Sultan of the Shot-Block-

TRAVIS
Demon of the Dunk-

TOUCHE
(leaps to his feet)
Lion of Judah!

TRAVIS
Let's get it!

We FOLLOW HAND-HELD as they tear YELLING out of the locker room, down a HALLWAY and into the gym. Mommit stands by the door, supported at the arm by Thelma, with her hand raised to slap each player a high-five as they run past-

MOMMIT
Get after them boys! Let's rock this place!

COURT - TEAM - ICE

As the team goes into their slam-dunk warmup routine, Ice begins to sing out, calling to the tune of Iko Iko, the other players responding-

ICE
Jes-u-its come jumpin high-

PLAYERS
Our team jumpin higher-

ICE
Start that clock and let it fly-

PLAYERS
Gonna set the court on fire!

All join in on the CHORUS as we segue into another GAME MONTAGE-

PLAYERS
Talkin bout our team!
(clap)
Our team!
(clap)
Our team runnin away!
Jes-u-its be standin still-
Our team runnin away!

The SONG CONTINUES as-

Dap scores on a beautiful give-and-go-

The Knights throw on a full court press, Snow steals, throws to Antoine who deals to Touche following the break- SLAM!

Travis plays Malone tight as white on rice, forces him into a bad shot-

Fast break. From Snow to Dap to Antoine to Snow- two points!

The black PARENTS CHEER-

PLAYERS
Travis Porter got the ball Isn't it
depressin? Every time he get the call
He gonna teach your ass a lesson!

Antoine dribbles between men and sinks a floating one-hander-

Malone misses a shot, gets position, taps in the rebound-

Ice faces his man left, right, left, then pops from the top of the key- swish!

Snow and Heatwave CHEER from the sidelines-

Father Grant CHEERS-

Jesuit breaks the press, long-passing to Malone who dumps it past Travis to Greenly for a jam!

Dap on the foul line, crossing himself-

Heatwave on the sideline, crossing himself in sympathy-

Dap shoots- hits! Mommit CHEERS-

Travis fakes a turnaround, deals out to Snow, then steps outside quickly himself to get the ball and hit a 15-footer!

Jerry runs under the basket, circling back off a double-pick to catch a pass and go up with a jumper- swish!

Travis leads a 3-on-2 break. He fakes a pass, skies, SLAMS the ball through!

SCOREBOARD

We are back to real time, the SONG ENDED. 1:12 on the clock, HOME 79, VISITOR 77-

COURT

Mike is on the foul line. Shooting two. He takes a deep breath, shoots- sinks the first one! He gets the ball back, crouches- it is very quiet-

MALONE SR. (O.S.)
You get off that floor, son.

Mike stiffens, turns. We SHIFT to see Malone stepping out onto the court, rage in his eyes-

MALONE SR.
I told you you weren't playin with these monkeys!

It is absolutely still in the gym. Mike looks at his father, not sure whether to yell or cry-

MALONE SR.
Are you comin or do I have to drag you off?

A tense moment. Mike holds his ground. Suddenly, a CALL from the white side of the floor-

WHITE FATHER
Sit down, Malone! Let the boys play!

This is joined immediately by others, CALLING-

OTHER PARENTS
Get off the court! Let's play ball!
Leave him alone! Call a technical!
(chanting)
Off the court! Off the court! Off the court!

Mike glares at his father, turns back to look at the rim-

TRAVIS

Taking all this in-

MALONE SR.

Malone sneers, stomps past him under the basket and SLAMS out the door to the outside. The referee steps into the key-

REFEREE
You ready son?

Mike nods, shaken. He dribbles, aims, shoots- air ball. A MOAN from the white parents. Snow calls a time out and the teams trot to their benches-

KNIGHT HUDDLE

VERRETT (calm)
We got all the time in the world. Just get good shots, use your heads on defense, no ball-hogging-

JESUIT HUDDLE

Mike has a fierce, wounded look on his face-

COACH SKINNER
You okay, Mike?

MIKE JR. (grumbles)
Just get me the ball.

COURT

Snow brings the ball down. Very quiet in the gym as the teams concentrate- we can hear the SNEAKER SQUEAKS again. They work the ball around. Antoine sets a pick for Snow, who drives by it- then snaps the ball back out to Antoine! Shot- swish!

PORTER FAMILY

Thelma totally into it now-

THELMA
That's my boy, Antoine! Shoot that thing!

Mommit gives her a look-

COURT

Jerry brings it up. Mike posts low, Travis right on his butt. Mike raises his arm-

MIKE JR.
Ball! Gimme the ball!

Jerry whips it in. Mike takes a dribble to the baseline, then reverses and comes across the middle with a power move to lay it over the rim-

SKINNER

COACH SKINNER
Defense! No fouls now!

COURT

Snow with the ball out front. Travis has his back to the basket, Mike on him one-on-one-

HEATWAVE

Calling from the sidelines-

HEATWAVE
Box-and-one defense! Box-and-one!

COURT - TRAVIS AND MIKE

Battling for position. Travis lets Mike come up tight against him, then hooks him with the chicken-wing and rolls for the basket! Snow passes, Travis catches and flips it back off the board and into the net!

STANDS

The black section CHEERING-

SCOREBOARD

:24 seconds left, HOME 81, VISITOR 80-

SKINNER

Yelling, frantic-

COACH SKINNER
Kill the clock, kill the clock!

FLOOR

The Jesuits go into a stall, Jerry, Duchamps and Lynch weaving, passing, trying to get fouled, running the time down. Dap head-fakes one way, cuts the other, tips the ball! He and Jerry scramble for it as it heads out of bounds- Dap dives and flicks the ball back hard at Jerry. It bounces off his shoulder out of bounds- Knights' ball!

SIDELINES

VERRETT
Time out! Call a time out!

HEATWAVE
No time-outs left, Father!

COURT

Jerry pressures Snow as he dribbles down the court. Travis sets up at the low post, raises his arm. We hear the white PARENTS counting down with the clock-

PARENTS
Ten, nine, eight, seven-

TRAVIS
Ball! Get me the ball!

SNAP! Snow sends it in. Mike and Greenly converge on him, hands up-

PARENTS
-six, five-

Travis fakes up, Mike and Greenly jump- Travis twists between them and shovels the ball to Touche under the hoop-

TOUCHE

In SLOW-MOTION he catches the ball, goes up, up, raising the ball high with one hand, up-

EXT. STREET - DAY - PHONE BOOTH

A LITTLE BOY listens to the news in a phone booth with broken glass panels. He drops the receiver, runs out-

EXT. ROSENWALD COURTS

We look through the fencing as the little boy runs across the street toward us. He meets ANOTHER LITTLE BOY at the fence, passes the word. The second little boy runs to Little Ricky, sitting on the rickety spectators' bench watching a pickup game. The boy whispers in his ear. Little Ricky stands up, climbs onto the bench, sticks his fingers in his mouth and WHISTLES loudly. The game stops. The game on the next court stops. All eyes are on Little Ricky. He raises a fist into the air-

LITTLE RICKY
The brothers by one!

INT. GYM - COURT - TOUCHE

WHAM! Touche drives the DUNK home like a pile-driver and the BUZZER sounds and we hear people CHEERING-

FLOOR

The Knights jumping around the floor, grabbing each other-

STANDS

Thelma hopping up and down-

THELMA
We won! We won!

MOMMIT
Girl, you embarrassin me! Course we won!

EXT. ROSENWALD COURTS

Major celebration. Everybody is SHOUTING, slapping high-fives-

INT. BARBER SHOP

Pinky, Alphonse, CUSTOMERS, even Jukebox and Mr. Blanchard, at the phone, are SHOUTING and congratulating each other. Pinky blasts a stream of shaving cream from a can into the air-

INT. GYM

Howard fights close to congratulate Verrett-

HOWARD
Hell of a job! One hell of a job! You gonna coach us next year?

VERRETT (shakes his head)
I teach history-

HOWARD
Well you just made some, brother!

FLOOR

The players have Heatwave up on their shoulders, tossing him up and down-

PLAYERS
Heatwave! Heatwave! Heatwave! Heatwave!

Travis breaks away from them, grinning ear-to-ear. He sees Father Verrett, grabs him for a sweaty hug-

VERRETT
So who was that? Elgin Baylor?

TRAVIS
(shakes his head, smiles)
Little Ricky Lewis.

Verrett is pulled away by congratulating parents and Travis steps away. He sees Mike sitting on the edge of the Jesuit bench, exhausted. They meet eyes. Mike stands, offers his hand. Travis shakes-

TRAVIS
Good game.

MIKE JR.
You too.

TRAVIS
You gonna be all right? Your father?

MIKE JR.
Give him twenty, thirty years, he'll come around-
(shrugs)
Colleges checking you out?

TRAVIS
Some.

MIKE JR.
The fellas from Cincinnatti and Michigan are down here. I'll have em come to your finals. Maybe we'll end up on the same team.

TRAVIS
Right-

MIKE JR. (smiles)
I sure as hell don't wanna play against you again.

FATHERS

Father Verrett joins Father Grant to watch from under the scoreboard-

GRANT
Look at them! This is going to be a great boost for the school-

VERRETT
Next year we integrate the league.

Grant gives him a look-

GRANT
Never quit, do you?

VERRETT
Should I?

GRANT
You know I- I try to imagine what it's like, being on the outside looking in for your whole life. Imagining isn't the same as being, is it?

VERRETT
No.

GRANT
I do my best.

VERRETT
I know you do. Thanks for the rope-
I almost hung myself a half-dozen
times there.
(looks to the floor)
Check out our boys-

They are back on solid ground with each other, happy. They look back to the celebration on the floor-

GRANT
So what's this about the Pope
invading Ethiopia?

CREDITS ROLL